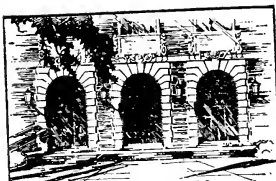


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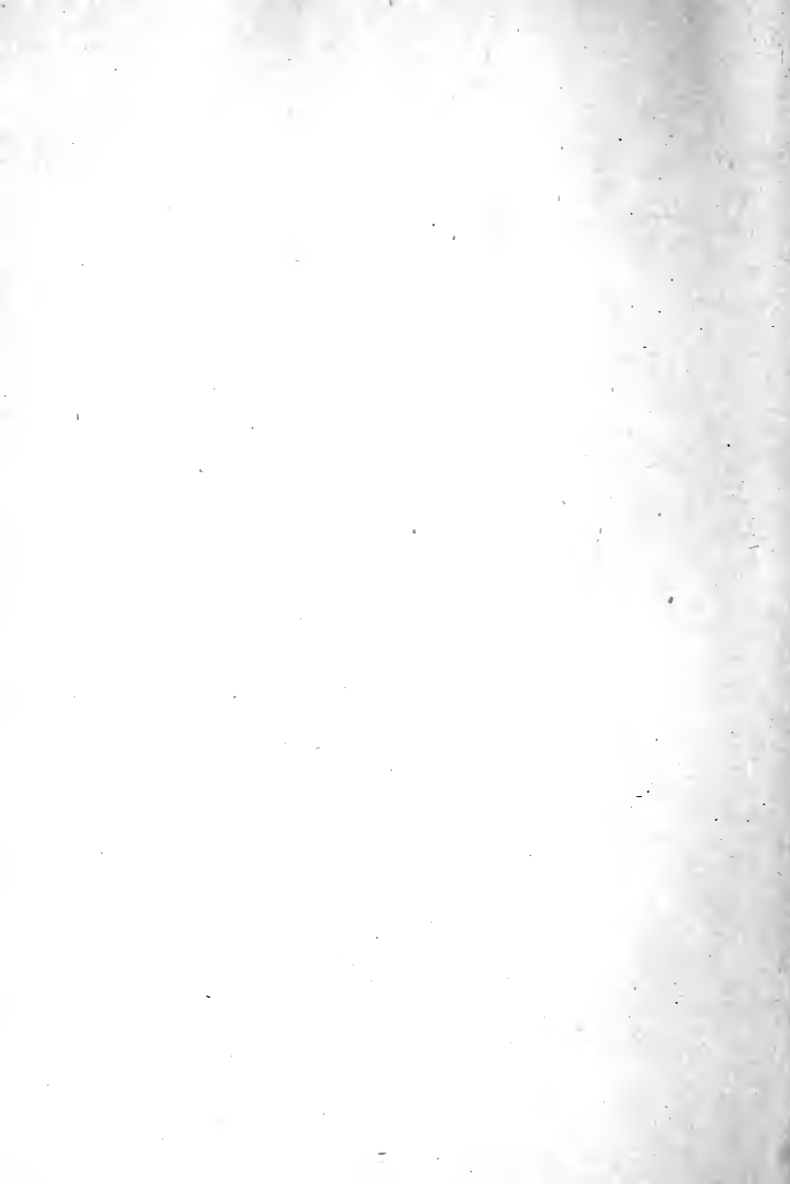
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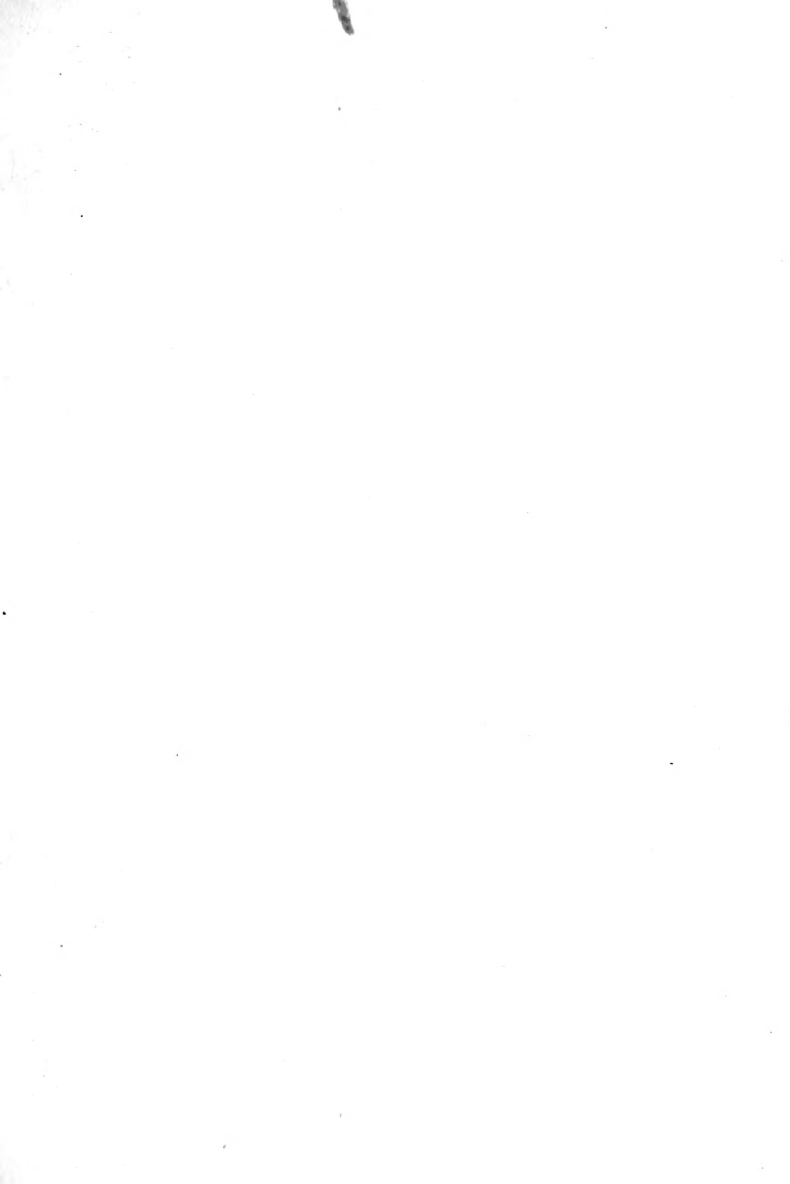
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THE FLAG OF DISTRESS.



THE FLAG OF DISTRESS:

A Story of the South Sea.

BY

CAPTAIN MAYNE REID.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LONDON:

TINSLEY BROTHERS, 8, CATHERINE STREET, STRAND.
1876.

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WOODFALL AND KINDER, PRINTERS,
MILFORD LANE, STRAND, W.C.

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THE FLAG OF DISTRESS.

CHAPTER I.

THE "HELL" EL DORADO.

A MONTÉ BANK in the city of San Francisco, in the establishment yeledped "El Dorado," part drinking-house, the other part devoted to gambling on the grandest scale. The two are carried on simultaneously, and in the same room—an oblong saloon—big enough for both. The portion of it devoted to Bacchus is at one end—that farthest from the entrance-door—where the shrine of the jolly god is represented by a liquor-bar extending from side to side, and backed by an array of shining bottles, glittering glasses, and

sparkling decanters ; his worship administered by half-a-dozen “bar-tenders,” resplendent in white shirts with wrist ruffles, and big diamond breast-pins—real, not paste !

The altar of Fortuna is altogether of a different shape and pattern, occupying more space. It is not compact, but extended over the floor, in the form of five tables, large as if for billiards ; though not one of them is of this kind. Billiards would be too slow a game for the frequenters of El Dorado. These could not patiently wait for the scoring of fifty points, even though the stake were a thousand dollars. “No, no ! *Monté* for me !” would be the word of every one of them ; or a few might say “*Faro*.” And of the five tables in the saloon, four are for the former game, the fifth furnished for the latter ; though there is but little apparent difference in the furniture of the two ; both having a simple cover of green baize, or broad-cloth, with certain crossing lines traced upon it, that of the *Faro* table having the full suite of thirteen cards arranged in two rows, face

upwards and fixed ; while on the Monté tables but two cards appear thus—the Queen and Knave ; or, as designated in the game—purely Spanish and Spanish-American—"Caballo" and "Sota." They are essentially card games, and altogether of chance, just as is the casting of dice.

In the El Dorado there are other modes to get rid of money, or make it, if chance so decides—a rare eventuality, save in the case of the professional gamblers themselves. In one corner of the saloon may be seen a roulette table ; in another, a backgammon board, with dice-boxes and cubes appertaining—not used for the simple, innocent game which the light leathern case with its chequered cover represents, but in the dead naked throwing of dice—doubloons, or dollars, changing hands at every throw.

Other gambling contrivances have place in the El Dorado : for it is a "hell" of the most complete kind ; but these are of slight importance compared with the great games, Monté and Faro—the real *pièces de résistance*—while the others

are only side-dishes, indulged in by such saunterers about the saloon as do not contemplate serious play. Of all, Monté is the main attraction, its convenient simplicity—for it is simple as “heads or tails”—making it possible for the veriest greenhorn to take part in it, with as much likelihood of winning as the oldest *habitué* of the place. Originally Mexican, in California and other western states it has become thoroughly Americanized.

Of the visible insignia of the game, and in addition to the two cards with their faces turned up, there is a complete pack, with several stacks of circular-shaped and variously coloured pieces of ivory—the “cheques” or counters of the game. These rest upon the table to the right or left of the dealer—usually the “banker” himself—in charge of his “croupier,” who pays them out, or draws them in, as the bank loses or wins, along with such coin as may have been staked upon the *albur*.

Around the table's edge, and in front of each

player, is his own private pile, usually a mixture of doubloons, dollars, and ivory cheques, with bags or packets of gold-dust and nuggets. Of bank-notes there are few, or none—the currency of California being through the medium of metal; at this time, 1849, most of it unminted, and in its crude state, as it came out of the mine, or the river mud. By the croupier's hand is a pair of scales with weights appertaining; their purpose, to ascertain the value of such little gold packages as are "punted" upon the cards—this only needed to be known when the bank is loser. Otherwise, they are ruthlessly raked in alongside the other deposits, without any note made of the amount.

The dealer sits centrally at the side of the table, in a grand chair, cards in hand. After shuffling, he turns their faces up, one by one, and with measured slowness. He interrupts himself at intervals as the face of a card is exposed, making a point for or against him in the game. Calling this out in calm voice and long-drawn monotone,

he waits for the croupier to square accounts; which the latter does by drawing in, or pushing out, the coins and cheques, with the nimbleness of a prestidigitateur. Old bets are rearranged, new ones made, and the dealing proceeds.

Around the tables sit, or stand, the players, exhibiting a variety of facial types, and national costumes. For there you may see not only human specimens of every known nationality, but of every rank in the social scale, with the callings and professions that appertain to it; an assemblage such as is rarely, if ever, observed elsewhere: gentlemen who may have won university honours; officers wearing gold straps on their shoulders, or bands of lace around the rims of their caps; native Californians, resplendent in slashed and buttoned velveteens; States' lawyers, and doctors, in sober black; even judges, who that same morning were seated upon the bench—may be all observed at the Monté table, mingling with men in red flannel shirts, blanket coats, and trousers tucked into the tops of mud-bedaubed boots;

with sailors in pea-jackets of coarse pilot, or Guernsey smocks, unwashed, unkempt, unshorn ; not only mingling with, but jostled by them—rudely, if occasion call.

All are on an equality here ; no class distinction in the saloon El Dorado ; for all are on the same errand—to get rich by gambling. The gold gleaming over the table is reflected in their faces. Not in smiles, or cheerfully ; but by an expression of hungry cupidity—fixed, as if stamped into their features. No sign of hilarity, or joyfulness ; not a word of badinage passing about, or between ; scarce a syllable spoken, save the call-words of the dealer, or an occasional remark by the croupier, explanatory of some disputed point about the placing, or payment, of stakes.

And if there be little light humour, neither is there much of ill-manners. Strangely assorted as is the motley crowd—in part composed of the roughest specimens of humanity—noisy speech is exceptional, and rude or boisterous behaviour rare. Either shown would be resented, and soon silenced ;

though, perhaps, not till after some noises of still louder nature—the excited, angry clamour of a quarrel, succeeded by the cracking of pistols; then a man borne off wounded, in all likelihood to die, or already dead, and stretched along the sanded floor, to be taken unconcernedly up, and carried feet-foremost out of the room.

And yet, in an instant, it will all be over. The gamesters, temporarily attracted from the tables, will return to them; the dealing of the cards will be resumed; and, amidst the chinking of coin, and the rattling of cheques, the sanguinary drama will not only cease to be talked about, but thought of. Bowie-knives, and pistols, are the police that preserve order in the gambling saloons of San Francisco.

Although the El Dorado is owned by a single individual, this is only as regards the house itself, with the drinking-bar and its appurtenances. The gaming-tables are under separate and distinct proprietorship; each belonging to a “banker,” who supplies the cash capital, and other necessities

for the game—in short, “runs” the table, to use a Californian phrase. As a general rule, the owner of a table is himself the dealer, and usually, indeed almost universally, a distinguished “sportsman”—this being the appellation of the Western States’ professional gambler, occasionally abbreviated to “sport.” He is a man of peculiar characteristics, though not confined to California. His “species” may be met with all over the United States, but more frequently in those of the South, and South-west; the Mississippi Valley being his congenial coursing-ground, and its two great metropolitan cities, New Orleans and St. Louis, his chief centres of operation. Natchez, Memphis, Vicksburg, Louisville, and Cincinnati permanently have him; but places more provincial, he only honours with an occasional visit. He is encountered aboard all the big steamboats—those called “crack,” and carrying the wealthier class of passengers; while the others he leaves to the more timid and less noted practitioners of his calling.

Wherever seen, the “sport” is resplendent in shirt-front, glittering studs, with a grand cluster of diamonds on his finger that sparkles like star, or stalactite, as he deals out the cards. He is, in truth, an *elegant* of the first water, apparelled and perfumed as a D’Orsay, or Beau Brummell ; and, although ranking socially lower than these, has a sense of honour quite as high—perhaps higher than had either.

CHAPTER II.

A MONTÉ BANK IN FULL BLAST.

IN the Hell El Dorado, as already said, there are five gambling tables, side by side, but with wide spaces between for the players. Presiding over the one which stands central is a man of about thirty years of age, of good figure, and well-formed features—the latter denoting Spanish descent—his cheeks clean shaven, the upper lip moustached, the under having a pointed imperial or “goatee,” which extends below the extremity of his chin.

He has his hat on—so has everybody in the room—a white beaver, set upon a thick shock of black wavy hair, its brim shadowing a face that would be eminently handsome but for the eyes, these showing sullen, if not sinister. Like his hair, they are coal-black, though he rarely raises

their lids, his gaze being habitually fixed on the cards held in his hands. Only once has he looked up, and around, on hearing a name pronounced bearing an odd resemblance to that of the game he is engaged in, though merely a coincidence. It is "Montijo." Two native Californians standing close behind him are engaged in a dialogue, in which they incidentally speak of Don Gregorio. It is a matter of no moment—only a slight allusion—and, as their conversation is almost instantly over, the Monté dealer again drops his long dark lashes, and goes on with the game, his features resuming their wonted impassibility.

Though to all appearance immobile as those of the Sphinx, one watching him closely could see, that there is something in his mind besides Monté. For although the play is running high, and large bets are being laid, he seems regardless about the result of the game—for this night only, since it has never been so before. His air is at times abstracted—more than ever after hearing that name—while he deals out the cards care-

lessly, once, or twice, making mistakes. But as these have been trifling, and readily rectified, the players around the table have taken no particular notice of them. Nor yet of his abstraction. It is not sufficiently manifest to attract attention; and with the wonderful command he has over himself, none of them suspect that he is, at that moment, a prey to reflections of the strongest and bitterest kind.

There is one, however, who is aware of it, knowing the cause; this, a man seated on the players' side of the table, and directly opposite the dealer. He is a personage of somewhat squat frame, a little below medium height, of swarth complexion, and straight black hair; to all appearance a *native* Californian, though not wearing the national costume, but simply a suit of dark broad-cloth. He lays his bet, staking large sums, apparently indifferent as to the result; while at the same time eyeing the deposits of the other players with eager nervous anxiety, as though their losses and gains concerned him more than

his own—the former, to all appearance, gladdening, the latter making him sad !

His behaviour might be deemed strange, and doubtless would, were there any one to observe it. But there is not; each player is absorbed in his own play, and the calculation of chances.

In addition to watching his fellow-gamesters around the table, the seemingly eccentric individual ever and anon turns his eye upon the dealer—its expression at such times being that of intense earnestness, with something that resembles reproof—as if he were annoyed by the latter handling his cards so carelessly, and would sharply rebuke him, could he get the opportunity without being observed. The secret of the whole matter being, that he is a sleeping-partner in the Monté bank—the moneyed one too; most of its capital having been supplied by him. Hence his indifference to the fate of his own stakes—for winning or losing is all the same to him—and his anxiety about those of the general circle of players.

His partnership is not suspected; or, if so, only by the initiated. Although sitting face to face with the dealer, no sign of recognition passes between them, nor is any speech exchanged. They seem to have no acquaintance with one another, beyond that begot out of the game.

And so the play proceeds, amidst the clinking of coin, and clattering of ivory pieces, these monotonous sounds diversified by the calls "Sota" this, and "Caballo" that, with now and then a "Carajo!" or it may be "Just my luck!" from the lips of some mortified loser. But, beyond such slight ebullition, ill-temper does not show itself, or, at all events, does not lead to any altercation with the dealer. That would be dangerous, as all are aware. On the table, close to his right elbow, rests a double-barrelled pistol, both barrels of which are loaded. And though no one takes particular notice of it, any more than it were a pair of snuffers on their tray, or one of the ordinary implements of the game, most know well enough that he who keeps

this standing symbol of menace before their eyes is prepared to use it on slight provocation.

It is ten o'clock, and the bank is in full blast. Up to this hour the players in one thin row around the tables were staking only a few dollars at a time—as skirmishers in advance of the main army, firing stray shots from pieces of light calibre. Now the heavy artillery has come up, the ranks have filled, and the files become doubled around the different tables—two circles of players, in places three, engaging in the game. And instead of silver dollars, gold eagles and doubloons—the last being the great guns—are flung down upon the green baize, with a rattle continuous as the firing of musketry. The battle of the night has begun.

But Monté and Faro are not the only attractions of the El Dorado. The shrine of Bacchus—its drinking bar—has its worshippers as well: a score of them standing in front of it, with others constantly coming and going.

Among the latest arrivals are two young men

in the attire of navy officers. At a distance it is not easy to distinguish the naval uniforms of nations—almost universally dark blue, with gold bands and buttons. More especially is it difficult when these are of the two cognate branches of the great Anglo-Saxon race—English and American. While still upon the street, the officers in question might have been taken for either; but once within the saloon, and under the light of its numerous lamps, the special insignia on their caps proclaim them as belonging to a British man-of-war. And so do they—since they are Edward Crozier and Willie Cadwallader.

They have entered without any definite design, further than, as Crozier said, to “have a shy at the tiger.” Besides, as they have been told, a night in San Francisco would not be complete without a look in upon “El Dorado.”

Soon as inside the saloon, they step towards its drinking-bar, Crozier saying :

“Come, Cad! let’s do some sparkling.”

"All right," responds the descendant of the Cymri, his face already a little flushed with what they have had at the *Parker*.

"Pint bottle of champagne !" calls Crozier.

"We've no pints here," saucily responds the bar-tender—a gentleman in shirt sleeves, with gold buckles on his embroidered braces—too grand to append the courtesy of "sir." "Nothing less than quarts," he deigns to add.

"A quart bottle, then !" cries Crozier, tossing down a doubloon to pay for it. "A gallon, if you'll only have the goodness to give it us."

The sight of the gold coin, with a closer inspection of his customers, and perhaps some dread of a second sharp rejoinder, secures the attention of the dignified Californian Gany-mede, who, relaxing his hauteur, condescends to serve them.

While drinking the champagne, the young officers direct their eyes towards that part of the saloon occupied by the gamesters ; where they see several clusters of men collected around

distinct tables, some sitting, others standing. They know what it means, and that there is Monté in their midst.

Though Cadwallader has often heard of the game, he has never played it, or been a spectator to its play. Crozier, who has both seen and played it, promises to initiate him.

Tossing off their glasses, and receiving the change—not much out of a doubloon—they approach one of the Monté tables—that in the centre of the saloon, around which there are players, standing and sitting three deep.

It is some time before they can squeeze through the two outside concentric rings, and get within betting distance of the table. Those already around it are not men to be pushed rudely apart, or make way for a couple of youngsters, however imposing their appearance, or impatient their manner. A mere officer's uniform is not much there, no matter the nationality. Besides, in the circle are officers of far higher rank than they, though belonging to a different service: naval

captains and commanders, and of army men, majors, colonels—even generals. What care these for a pair of boisterous subalterns? Or what reck the rough gold-diggers, and stalwart trappers, seen around the table, for any or all of them? It is a chain, however ill-assorted in its links, not to be severed *sans cérémonie*; and the young English officers must bide their time. A little patience, and their turn will come too.

Practising this, they wait for it with the best grace they can. And not very long. One after another, the more unfortunate of the gamesters get played out; each, as he sees his last dollar swept away from him by the ruthless rake of the croupier, heaving a sigh, and retiring from the table; most of them with seeming reluctance, and looking back, as a stripped traveller at the footpad who has turned his pockets inside out.

Soon the outer ring is broken, leaving spaces between; into one of which slips Crozier, Cadwallader pressing in along side of him.

Gradually they squeeze nearer and nearer, till they are close to the table's edge.

Having, at length, obtained a position, where they can conveniently place bets, they are about plunging their hands into their pockets for the necessary stakes, when all at once the act is interrupted. The two turn towards one another, with eyes, attitude, everything expressing not only surprise, but stark, speech-depriving astonishment.

For on the opposite side of the table, seated in a grand chair, presiding over the game, and dealing out the cards, Crozier sees the man who has been making love to Carmen Montijo—his rival of the morning—while, at the same instant, Cadwallader has caught sight of *his* rival—the suitor of Iñez Alvarez !

CHAPTER III.

FIGHTING THE TIGER.

AT sight of De Lara and Calderon, the English officers stand speechless, as if suddenly struck dumb; for a pang has shot through their hearts, bitter as a poisoned shaft.

Crozier feels it the keenest, since it is an affair that most concerns him. The suitor of Carmen Montijo a "sport"—a common gambler! Favoured, or not, still an aspirant to her hand; though it were chagrin enough to think of such a man being even on terms of acquaintance with her.

Cadwallader is less affected, though he too is annoyed. For although Calderon is in the circle of outside players—apparently a simple *punter*, like the rest—the companionship of the morning, with the relations existing between

the two men, tell of their being socially the same. He already knows his rival to be a blackguard ; in all likelihood, he is also a blackleg.

Quick as thought itself, these reflections pass through the minds of the young Englishmen ; though for some time neither says a word—their looks alone communicating to each other what both bitterly feel.

Fortunately, their surprise is not noticed by the players around the table. Each is engrossed in his own play, and gives but a glance at the new-comers, whose naval uniforms are not the only ones there.

But there are two who take note of them in a more particular manner : these, Faustino Calderon, and Francisco de Lara. Calderon, looking along the table—for he is on that same side—regards them with glances, furtive, almost timid. Very different is the manner of De Lara. At sight of Crozier he suspends the deal, his face suddenly turning pale, while a

spark of angry light flashes forth from his eyes. The passionate display is to all appearance unobserved; or, if so, attributed to some trifling cause, as annoyance at the game going against him. It is almost instantly over; and the disturbed features of the Monté dealer resume their habitual expression of stern placidity.

The English officers having recovered from their first shock of astonishment, also find restored to them the faculty of speech; and now exchange thoughts, though not about that which so disturbs them. By a sort of tacit understanding it is left to another time, Crozier only saying:

“We’ll talk of it, when we get aboard ship. That’s the place for sailors to take counsel together, with a clear head, such as we will want. At this precious minute, I feel like a fish out of water.”

“By Jove! so do I.”

“The thing we’re both thinking of has raised the devil in me. But let us not bother about

it now. I've got something else in my mind. I'm half-mad, and intend *fighting the tiger*."

"Fighting the tiger! What do you mean by that, Ned? I don't quite comprehend."

"You soon will. If you wish it, I'll give you a little preliminary explanation."

"Yes, do. Perhaps I can assist you."

"No, you can't. There's only one who can."

"Who is he?"

"It's not a he, but a she: the Goddess of Fortune. I intend soliciting her favours; if she but grant them, I'll smash Mr. De Lara's Monté bank."

"Impossible! There's no probability of your being able to do that."

"Not much probability, I admit. Still there's a possibility. I've seen such a thing done before now. Bold play, and big luck, combined will do it. I'm in for the first; whether I have the last, remains to be seen. In any case, I'll either break the bank, or lose all

I've got on me—which by chance is a pretty big stake to begin with. So here goes !”

Up to this time their conversation has been carried on in a low tone ; no one hearing or caring to listen to it—all being too much absorbed in their own calculations to take heed of the bets or combinations of others. If any one gives a glance at them, and sees them engaged in their *sotto-voce* dialogue, it is but to suppose they are discussing which card they had best bet upon—whether the *Sota* or *Caballo* ; and whether it would be prudent to risk a whole dollar, or limit their lay to the more modest sum of fifty cents.

They who may have been thus conjecturing, with everybody else, are taken by surprise, in fact, somewhat startled, when the older of the two officers, bending across the table, tosses a hundred pound Bank of England note upon the baize, with as much nonchalance as if it were but a five-dollar bill !

“ Shall I give you cheques for it ?” asks the croupier, after examining the crisp note—cur-

rent over all the earth—and knowing it good as gold.

“No,” answers Crozier; “not yet. You can give that after the bet’s decided—if I win it. If not, you can take the note. I place it on the Queen, against the Knave.”

The croupier, simply nodding assent, places the note as directed.

During the interregnum in which this little episode occurs, the English officers, hitherto scarce noticed, are broadly stared at, and closely scrutinized—Crozier becoming the cynosure of every eye. He stands it with a placid tranquillity, which shows him as careless about what they may think him, as he is of his cash.

Meanwhile, the cards have had a fresh shuffle, and the deal begins anew; all eyes again turning upon the game. In earnest expectancy; those who, like Crozier, have placed upon the Queen, wishing her to show her face first. And she does.

“*Caballo en la puerta mozo!*” (The Queen in the door wins) cries the dealer, the words

drawled out with evident reluctance, while a flash of fierce anger is seen scintillating in his eyes.

“ Will you take it in cheques ? ” asks the croupier, addressing himself to Crozier, after settling the smaller bets. “ Or shall I pay you in specie ? ”

“ You needn’t pay yet. Let the note lie. Only cover it with a like amount. I go it double, and again upon the Queen.”

Stakes are relaid—some changed—others left standing or doubled, as Crozier’s, which is now a bet for two hundred pounds.

On goes the game, the piece of smooth paste-board slipping silently from the jewelled fingers of the dealer, whose eye is bent upon the cards, as if he saw through them—or would, if he could. But whatever his wish, he has no power to change the chances. If he have any professional tricks, there is no opportunity for him to practise them. There are too many eyes looking on ; too many pistols and bowie-knives about ; too many men ready

to stop any attempt at cheating, and punish it, if attempted.

Again he is compelled to call out :

“ *Caballo en la puerta mozo!* ”

“ Now, sir ; ” says the croupier to Crozier, after settling other scores ; “ you want your money, I suppose ? ”

“ Not yet. I’m not pressed, and can afford to wait. I again go double, and am still contented with my Queen.”

The dealing proceeds ; with four hundred pounds lying on the *Caballo* to Crozier’s account—and ten times as much belonging to other betters. For now that the luck seems to be running with the Englishman, most lay their stakes beside his.

Once again : “ *Caballo en la puerta mozo!* ”

And again Crozier declines to take up his bet.

He has now eight hundred pounds sterling upon the card—sixteen hundred on the turn of the game—while the others, thoroughly assured

that his luck is on the run, double theirs, till the bets against the bank post up to as many thousands.

De Lara begins to look anxious, and not a little down-hearted. Still more anxious, and lower in heart, appears him seated on the opposite side—Calderon; for it is his money that is moving away. He is visibly excited. On the contrary, Crozier is as cool as ever, his features set in a rigid determination to do what he promised—break the bank, or lose all he has got about him. The last, not likely yet, for soon again comes the cry :

“ *The Queen winner !* ”

There is a pause longer than usual, for the settling of such a large score; and after it an interval of inaction. The dealer seems inclined to discontinue; for still lying upon the Queen is Crozier's stake, once more doubled, and now counting three thousand two hundred pounds!

Asked if he intends to let it remain, he replies sneeringly :

“Of course I do; I insist upon it. And once more I go for the Queen. Let those who like the Knave better, back him!”

“Go on! Go on!” is the cry around the table, from many voices speaking in tone of demand.

De Lara glances at Calderon furtively, but, to those observing it, with a look of interrogation. Whatever the sign, or answer, it decides him to go on dealing.

The bets are again made; to his dismay, almost everybody laying upon the Queen, and, as before, increasing their stakes. And in like proportion is heightened the interest in the game. It is too intense for any display of noisy excitement now. And there is less throughout the saloon; for many from the other tables, as all the saunterers, have collected round, and standing several deep, gaze over one another's shoulders, with as much eager earnestness as if a man were expiring in their midst.

The ominous call at length comes—not in clear

voice, or tone exultant, but feeble, and as if rung reluctantly from the lips of the Monté dealer. For it is again a verdict averse to the bank :

“ *Caballo en la puerta mozo !*

As De Lara utters the words, he dashes the cards down, scattering them all over the table. Then rising excitedly from his chair, adds in faltering tone :

“ Gentlemen, I’m sorry to tell you, the bank’s broke ! ”

CHAPTER IV.

A PLUCKY "SPORT."

"The bank's broke!"

Three words, that despite their bad grammar, have oft—too oft—startled the ear, and made woe in many a heart.

At hearing them, the gamesters of the El Dorado seated around Frank Lara's Monté table spring to their feet, as if their chairs had suddenly become converted into iron at white heat. They rise simultaneously, as though all were united in a chain, elbow and elbow together.

But while thus gesturing alike, very different is the expression upon their faces. Some simply show surprise; others look incredulous; while not a few give evidence of anger.

For an instant there is silence—the surprise, the incredulity, the anger having suspended

speech. This throughout the saloon; for all, bar-drinkers as well as gamesters, have caught the ominous words, and thoroughly understand their import. No longer resounds the chink of ivory cheques, or the metallic ring of doubloons and dollars. No longer the thudding down of decanters, nor the jingle of glasses. Instead, a stillness so profound that one entering at this moment might fancy it a Quakers' meeting, but for the symbols seen around—these, anything but Quakerish. Easier to imagine it a grand gambling-hell, where dealers, croupiers, players, and spectators have all been suddenly turned to stone, or have become figures in wax-work.

The silence is of the shortest—as also the immobility of the men composing the different groups—only for a half-score seconds. Then there is noise enough, with plenty of gesticulation. A roar arises that fills the room; while men rush about wildly, madly, as if in the courtyard of a lunatic asylum. Some show anger—those who are losers by the breaking of the bank.

Many have won large bets, their stakes still lying on the table, which they know will not be paid. The croupier has told them so, confessing his cash-box cleared out at the last settlement; even this having been effected with the now protested ivory cheques.

Some gather up their gold or silver, and stow it in safety; growling, but satisfied that things are no worse. Others are not so lenient. They do not believe there is a good cause for the suspension, and insist upon being paid in full. They rail at the proprietor of the bank, adding menace. De Lara is the man thus marked. They see him before them, grandly dressed, glittering with diamonds. They talk of stripping him of his *bijouterie*.

"No, gentlemen!" he exclaims, with a sardonic sneer. "Not that, if you please—not yet. First hear me, and then it will be time for you to strike."

"What have you to say?" demands one, with his fists full of ivory counters, unredeemed.

“Only that I’m not the *owner* of this bank, and never have been.”

“Who is, then?” ask several at the same time.

“Well; that I can’t tell you just now; and, what’s more, I *won’t*. No, that I won’t.”

The gambler says this with emphasis, and an air of sullen determination, that has its effect upon his questioners—even the most importunate. For a time it stays their talk, as well as action.

Seeing this, he follows it up with further speech, somewhat more conciliatory.

“As I’ve said, gentlemen, I’m not the owner of this concern—only the dealer of the cards. You ask, who’s proprietor of the smashed table. It’s natural enough you should want to know. But it’s just as natural that it ain’t my business to tell you. If I did, it would be a shabby trick; and, I take it, you’re all men enough to see it in that light. If there’s any who isn’t, he can have my card, and call upon me at his convenience. My name’s Francisco de Lara—or Frank Lara,

for short. I can be found here, or anywhere else in San Francisco, at such time as may suit anxious inquirers. And if any wants me now, and can't wait, I'm good this minute for pistols across that bit of board we've just been seated at. Yes, gentlemen! Any of you who'd relish a little amusement of that kind, let him come on! It'll be a change from the Monté. For my part, I'm tired of shuffling cards, and would like to rest my fingers on a trigger. Which of you feels disposed to give me the chance? Don't all speak at once!"

No one feels disposed, and no one speaks; at least in hostile tone, or to take up the challenge. Instead, half a score surround the "sport," and not only express their admiration of his pluck, but challenge him to an encounter of drinks, not pistols.

Turning towards the bar, they vociferate, "Champagne!"

Contented with the turn things have taken, and proud at the volley of invitations, De Lara

accepts ; and soon the vintage of France is seen effervescing from a dozen tall glasses, and the Monté dealer stands drinking in the midst of his admirers.

Other groups draw up to the bar-counter, while twos and solitary tipplers fill the spaces between.

The Temple of Fortuna is for a time deserted, her worshippers transferring their devotion to the shrine of Bacchus. The losers drink to drown disappointment, while the winners quaff cups in the exhilaration of success.

If a bad night for the bank, it is a good one for the bar. Decanters are speedily emptied, and bottles of many kinds go “down among the dead men.”

* * * * *

The excitement in the El Dorado is soon over. Occurrences of like kind, but often of more tragical termination, are too common in California to cause any long-sustained interest. Within the hour will arise some new event, equally stirring,

leaving the old to live only in the recollection of those who have been active participants in it.

So with the breaking of Frank Lara's bank. A stranger, entering the saloon an hour after, from what he there sees, could not tell, neither would he suspect, that an incident of so serious nature had occurred. For in less than this time the same Monté table is again surrounded by gamblers, as if its play had never been suspended. The only difference observable is that quite another individual presides over it, dealing out the cards, while a new croupier has replaced him whose cash receipts so suddenly ran short of his required disbursements.

The explanation is simply that there has been a change of owners, another celebrated "sport" taking up the abandoned bank and opening it anew. With a few exceptions the customers are the same, their number not sensibly diminished. Most of the old players have returned to it, while the places of those who have defected, and gone off to other gambling resorts, are filled by fresh arrivals.

A small party of gentlemen, who think they have had play enough for that night, have left the El Dorado for good. Among these are the English officers, whose visit proved so prejudicial to the interests of the place.

De Lara, too, and Calderon, with other confederates, have forsaken the saloon. But whither gone no one knows, or seems to care; for the fortunes of fallen men soon cease to interest those who are themselves madly struggling to mount up.

CHAPTER V.

A SUPPER CARTE-BLANCHE.

ON parting from the El Dorado, Crozier and Cadwallader do not go directly aboard the *Crusader*. They know that their boat will be awaiting them at the place appointed. But the appointment is for a later hour; and as the breaking of the Monté bank, with the incidents attendant, occupied but a short while, there will be time for them to see little a more of San Franciscan life. They have fallen in with several other young officers, naval like themselves, though not of their own ship, nor yet their own navy, or nation, but belonging to one cognate and kindred—Americans. Through the freemasonry of their common profession, with these they have fraternized, and it is agreed they

shall all sup together. Crozier has invited the Americans to a repast the most *recherché*, as the costliest, that can be obtained at the grandest hotel in San Francisco, the *Parker House*. He adds humorously, that he is able to stand the treat. And well he may; since, besides the English money with which he entered the El Dorado, he has brought thousands of dollars out of it, and would have brought more had all the ivory cheques been honoured. As it is, his pockets are filled with notes and gold; as also those of Cadwallader, who helps him to carry the shining stuff. Part of the heavy metal he has been able to change into the more portable form of bank-notes. Yet the two are still heavily weighted — “laden like hucksters’ donkeys!” jokingly remarks Cadwallader, as they proceed towards the *Parker*.

At the hotel a private room is engaged; and, according to promise, Crozier bespeaks a repast of the most sumptuous kind, with *carte-blanche* for the best wines—champagne at three guineas a

bottle, hock the same, and South-side Madeira still more. What difference to him ?

The supper ordered in the double-quick soon makes its appearance. Sooner in San Francisco than in any other city in the world ; in better style, too, and better worth the money ; for the Golden City excels in the science of gastronomy. Even then, amidst her canvas sheds, and weather-boarded houses, could be obtained dishes of every kind known to Christendom, or Pagandom : the *cuisine* of France, Spain, and Italy ; the roast beef of Old England, as the pork and beans of the New ; the *gumbo* of Guinea, and *sauerkraut* of Germany, side by side with the swallow's-nest soup and sea-slugs of China. Had Lucullus but lived in these days, he would have forsaken the banks of the Tiber, and made California his home.

The repast furnished by the *Parker House*, however splendid, has to be speedily despatched ; for unfortunately time forbids the leisurely enjoyment of the viands, to a certain extent

marring the pleasure of the occasion. All the officers, American as English, have to be on their respective ships at the stroke of twelve.

Reluctantly breaking up their hilarious company, they prepare to depart.

They have forsaken the supper-room, and passed on to the outer saloon of the hotel ; like all such, furnished with a drinking-bar.

Before separating, and while buttoning up against the chill night-air, Crozier calls out :

“Come, gentlemen ; one more glass ! The stirrup-cup !”

In San Francisco this is always the wind-up to a night of revelry. No matter how much wine has been quaffed, the carousal is not deemed complete without a last “valedictory” drink taken standing at the bar.

Giving way to the Californian custom, the officers range themselves along the marble slab ; bending over which, the polite bar-keeper asks :

“What is it to be, gentlemen ?”

There is a moment of hesitation, the gentlemen

—already well wine—scarce knowing what to call for. Crozier cuts the Gordian-knot by proposing :

“A round of punches *à la Romaine*!”

Universal assent to this delectable drink ; as all know, just the thing for a night-cap.

Soon the cooling beverage, compounded with snow from the Sierra Nevada, appears upon the counter, in huge glasses, piled high with the sparkling crystals ; a spoon surmounting each—for punch *à la Romaine* is not to be drunk, but eaten.

Shovelling it down in haste, adieus are exchanged, with a hearty shake of hands. Then the American officers go off, leaving Crozier and Cadwallader in the saloon ; these only staying to settle the account.

While standing by the bar, waiting for it to be brought, they cast a glance around the room. At first careless, it soon becomes concentrated on a group seen at some distance off, near one of the doors leading out, of which there are several. There

are also several other groups; for the saloon is of large dimensions, besides being the most popular place of resort in San Francisco. And for San Francisco the hour is not yet late. Along the line of the drinking-bar, and over the white-sanded floor, are some scores of people of all qualities and kinds, in almost every variety of costume; though they who compose the party that has attracted the attention of the English officers show nothing particular—that is, to the eye of one unacquainted with them. There are four of them, two wearing broadcloth cloaks, the other two having their shoulders shrouded under *serapes*. Nothing in all that. The night is cold, indeed wet, and they are close to the door, to all appearance intending soon to step out. They have only paused to exchange a parting word, as if they designed to separate before issuing into the street.

Though the spot where they stand is in shadow—a folding screen separating it from the rest of the saloon—and it is not easy to get sight of their

faces—the difficulty increased by broad-brimmed hats set slouchingly on their heads, with their cloaks and serapes drawn up around their throats—Crozier and Cadwallader have not only seen, but recognized them. A glance at their countenances, caught before the muffling was made, enabled the young officers to identify three of them as De Lara, Calderon, and the *ci-devant* croupier of the Monté bank. The fourth, whose face they have also seen, is a personage not known to them; but, judging by his features, a suitable associate for the other three.

Soon as catching sight of them, which he is the first to do, Crozier whispers to his companion:

“See, Will! Look yonder! Our friends from the El Dorado!”

“By Jove! them, sure enough. Do you think they’ve been following us?”

“I shouldn’t wonder. I was only surprised they didn’t do something, when they had us in their gambling den. After the heavy draw I

made on Mr. Lara's bank, I expected no less than that he'd try to renew his acquaintance with me ; all the more from his having been so free of it in the morning. Instead, he and his friend seemed to studiously avoid coming near us—not even casting a look in our direction. That rather puzzled me.”

“It needn't. After what you gave him, I should think he'll feel shy of another encounter.”

“No ; that's not it. Blackleg though the fellow be, he's got game in him. He gave proof of it in the El Dorado, defying, and backing everybody out. It was an exhibition of real courage, Will ; and, to tell the truth, I couldn't help admiring it—can't now. When I saw him presiding over the gambling table, and dealing out the cards, I at once made up my mind that it would never do to meet him—even if he challenged me. Now, I've decided differently ; and if he call me out, I'll give him a chance to recover a little of his lost reputation. I will, upon my honour.”

“But why should you ? A 'sport,' a profes-

sional gambler! The thing would be simply ridiculous."

"Nothing of the kind—not here in California. On the contrary, I should cut a more ridiculous figure by refusing him satisfaction. It remains to be seen, whether he'll seek it according to the correct code."

"That he won't; at least, I don't think he will. From the way that lot have got their heads together, it looks as if they meant mischief, *now*. They may have been watching their opportunity—to get us two alone. What a pity we didn't see them before our friends went off! They're good fellows, those Yankee officers, and would have stood by us."

"No doubt they would. But it's too late now. They're beyond hailing distance, and we must take care of ourselves. Get your dirk ready, Will, and have your hand close to the butt of that shooting-iron, you took from Mr. De Lara."

"I have it that way. Never fear. Wouldn't

it be a good joke if I have to give the fellow a pill out of his own pistol?"

"No joking matter to us, if they're meditating an attack. Though we disarmed him in the morning, he'll be freshly provided, and with weapons in plenty. I'll warrant each of the four has a battery concealed under his cloak. They appear as if concocting some scheme, which we'll soon know all about—likely before leaving the house. Certainly, they're up to something."

"Four hundred and ninety dollars, gentlemen!"

The financial statement is made by the office clerk presenting the bill.

"There!" cries Crozier, flinging down a five hundred dollar bill. "Let that settle it. You can keep the change for yourself."

"Thank ye," dryly responds the Californian dispenser of drinks, taking the ten dollar tip with less show of gratitude than a London waiter would give for a fourpenny piece—little as that may be.

Turning to take departure, the young officers again look across the saloon, to learn how the hostile party has disposed itself. To their surprise, the gamblers are gone ; having disappeared while the account was being paid.

“ I don’t like the look of it,” says Crozier, in a whisper. “ Less now than ever. No doubt we’ll find them outside. Well ; we can’t stay here all night. If they attack us, we must do our best. Take a firm grip of your pistol, with your finger close to the trigger ; and if any of them shows sign of shooting, see that you fire first. Follow me ; and keep close ! ”

On the instant of delivering these injunctions, he starts towards the door, Cadwallader following as directed.

Both step out, and for a short while stand gazing interrogatively around them. People they see in numbers, some lounging by the hotel porch, others passing along the street. But none in cloaks, or *serapes*. The gamblers must have gone clear away.

“ After all, we may have been wronging them,” remarks Crozier, as in his nature, giving way to a generous impulse. “ I can hardly think that a fellow who’s shown such courage would play the assassin. Maybe they were but putting their heads together about challenging us? If that’s it, we may expect to hear from them in the morning. It looks all right. Anyhow, we can’t stay dallying here. If we’re not aboard by eight bells, old Bracebridge ’ll masthead us. Let’s heave along, my hearty ! ”

So saying, he leads off, Cadwallader close on his quarter—both a little unsteady in their steps, partly from being loaded with the spoils of El Dorado, and partly from the effects of the *Parker House* wines, and punches *à la Romaine*.

CHAPTER VI.

HARRY BLEW HOMELESS.

WHILE the exciting scene described as taking place in the saloon, El Dorado, was at its height, Harry Blew went past the door. Could the sailor have seen through walls, he would have entered the Hell. The sight of his former officers would have attracted him inside ; there to remain, for more reasons than one.

Of one he had already thought. Conjecturing that the young gentlemen might be going on a bit of spree, and knowing the dangers of such in San Francisco, it had occurred to him to accompany, or keep close after them—in order that he might be at hand, should they come into collision with any of the roughs and rowdies thick upon the street. Unfortunately, this idea, like that of asking them for a cash loan, had come too late ;

and they were out of sight ere he could take any steps towards its execution. A glance into the gambling-saloon would have brought both opportunities back again ; and, instead of continuing to wander hungry through the streets, he would have had a splendid supper, and after it a bed, either in some respectable hostelry, or his old bunk aboard the *Crusader*.

It was not to be. While passing the El Dorado, he could know nothing of the friends that were so near ; and thus unconscious, he leaves the glittering saloon behind, and a half-score others lighted with like brilliancy.

For a while longer he saunters slowly about, in the hope of yet encountering the officers. Several times he sees men in uniform, and makes after them, only to find they are not English.

At length giving it up, he quickens his pace, and strikes for the office of Silvestre, which he knows to be in the street fronting the water.

As San Francisco is not like an old seaport, where house-room is cheap and abundant, but

every foot of roof-shelter utilized by day as by night, there is a chance the office may still be open. In all probability, the shipping-agent sleeps by the side of his ledger; or, if not, likely enough one of his clerks. In which case he, Harry Blew, may be allowed to lie along the floor, or get a shake-down in some adjoining shed. He would be but too glad to stretch himself on an old sack, a naked bench, or, for that matter, sit upright in a chair. For he is now fairly fagged out perambulating the unpaved streets of that inhospitable town.

Tacking from corner to corner, now and then hitching up his trousers, to give freer play to his feet, he at length comes out upon the street which fronts upon the bay. In his week's cruising about the town he has acquired some knowledge of its topography, and knows well enough where he is; but not the office of the shipping-agent. It, therefore, takes him a considerable time to find it. Along the water's edge the houses are irregularly placed, and numbered with like irre-

gularity. Besides, there is scarce any light; the night has become dark, with a sky densely clouded, and the street-lamps burning whale-oil are dim, and at long distances apart. It is with difficulty he can make out the figures upon the doors. However, he is at length successful, and deciphers on one the number he is in search of—as also the name “Silvestre,” painted on a piece of tin attached to the side-post.

A survey of the house—indeed, a single glance at it—convinces him he has come thither to no purpose. It is a small wooden structure, not much bigger than a sentry-box, evidently only an office, with no capability of conversion to a bed-chamber. Still it has room enough to admit of a man’s lying at full length along its floor; and, as already said, he would be glad of so disposing himself for the night. There may be some one inside, though the one window—in size corresponding to the shanty itself—looks black and forbidding.

With no very sanguine hope, he lays hold of

the door-handle, and gives it a twist. Locked, as he might have expected !

The test not satisfying him, he knocks. At first timidly ; then a little bolder and louder ; finally, giving a good round rap with his knuckles—hard as horn. At the same time he hails sailor-fashion :

“ Ahoy, there ; be there any one within ? ”

This in English ; but, remembering that the ship-agent is a Spaniard, he follows his first hail with another in the Spanish tongue, adding the usual formulary :

“ *Abre la puerta !* ”

Neither to question, nor demand is there any response. Only the echo of his own voice reverberated along the line of houses, and dying away in the distance, as it mingles with the sough of the sea.

No use speaking, or knocking again. Undoubtedly, Silvestre's office is closed for the night ; and his clerks, if there be any, have their sleeping-quarters elsewhere.

Forced to this conclusion, though sadly dissatisfied with it, the ex-man-o'-war's-man turns away from the door, and once more goes cruising along the streets. But now, having no definite point to steer for, he makes short tacks and turns, like a ship sailing under an unfavourable wind—or as one disregarding the guidance of the compass, without steersman at the wheel.

After beating about for nearly another hour, he discovers himself contiguous to the water's edge. His instincts have conducted him thither—as the seal, after a short inland excursion, finds its way back to the beach. Ah! if he could only swim like a seal!

This thought occurs to him as he stands looking over the sea in the direction of the *Crusader*. Were it possible to reach the frigate, all his troubles would soon be forgotten in the cheerful companionship of his old chums of the forepeak.

It can't be. The man-of-war is anchored more than two miles off. Strong swimmer though he knows himself, it is too far. Besides, a fog has

suddenly sprung up, overspreading the bay, so that the frigate is hidden from his sight. Even ships lying close in shore can be but faintly discerned through its film, and only the larger spars; the smaller ones, with the rigging-ropes, looking like the threads of a spider's web.

Down-hearted, almost despairing, Harry Blew halts upon the beach. What is he to do? Lie down on the sand, and there go to sleep? There are times when on the shores of San Francisco Bay this would not be much of a hardship. But now, it is the season of winter, when the Pacific current, coming from latitudes farther north, rolls in through the Golden Gate, bringing with it fogs that spread themselves over the great estuary inside. Although not frosty, these are cold enough to be uncomfortable, and the haze now is accompanied by a chill drizzling rain.

Standing under it, Harry Blew feels he is fast getting wet. If he do not obtain shelter, he will soon be soaked to the skin.

Looking inquiringly around, his eye rests upon

a boat, which lies bottom upward on the beach, appearing through the thick rain like the carapace of a gigantic turtle. It is an old ship's launch that has bilged, and either been abandoned as useless, or upturned to receive repairs. No matter what its history, it offers the hospitality so scurvily refused him at the Sailor's Home. If it cannot give him supper, or bed, it will be some protection against the rain that has now commenced coming down in big clouting drops.

This deciding him, he creeps under the cap-sized launch, and lays himself at full length along the shingle.

CHAPTER VII.

IN DANGEROUS PROXIMITY.

THE spot upon which the ex-man-o'-war's man has stretched himself is soft as a feather-bed. Still he does not fall asleep. The rain, filtering through the sand, soon finds its way under the boat; and, saturating his couch, makes it uncomfortable. This, with the cold night-air, keeps him awake.

He lies listening to the sough of the sea, and the big drops pattering upon the planks above.

Not long before other sounds salute his ear, distinguishable as human voices—men engaged in conversation.

As he continues to listen, the voices grow louder, those who converse evidently drawing nearer.

In a few seconds they are by the boat's side, where they come to a stand. But though they have paused in their steps, they continue to talk in excited, earnest tones. And so loud, that he can hear every word they say; though the speakers are invisible to him. The capsized boat is not so flush with the sand, as to prevent him from seeing the lower part of their legs, from the knees downward. Of these there are four pairs, two of them in trousers of the ordinary kind; the other two in *calzoneras* of velveteen, bordered at the bottoms with black stamped leather. But, that all four men are Californians, or Spaniards, he can tell by the language in which they are conversing—Spanish. A lucky chance that he understands something of this—if not for himself, for the friends who are dear to him.

The first intelligible speech that reaches his ear is an interrogatory:

“ You're sure, Calderon, they'll come this way ? ”

“Quite sure, De Lara. When I stood by them at the hotel-bar, I heard the younger of the two tell one of the American officers that their boat was to meet them at the wooden *muello*—the new pier, as you know. To reach that they must pass by here; there’s no other way. And it can’t be long before they make appearance. They were leaving the hotel at the time we did, and where else should they go?”

“No knowing”—this from the voice of a third individual. “They may stay to take another *copita*, or half a dozen. These *Inglese* can drink like fish, and don’t seem to feel it.”

“The more they drink the better for us,” remarks a fourth. “Our work will be the easier.”

“It may not be so easy, Don Manuel,” puts in De Lara. “Young as they are, they’re very devils both. Besides, they’re well armed, and will battle like grizzly bears. I tell you, *camarados*, we’ll have work to do before we get back our money.”

“But do you intend killing them, De Lara?” asks he who has been called Calderon.

“Of course. We must, for our own sakes. ’Twould be madness not, even if we could get the money without it. The older, Crozier, is enormously rich, I’ve heard; could afford to buy up all the law there is in San Francisco. If we let them escape, he’d have the police after us like hounds upon a trail. Even if they shouldn’t recognize us now, they’d be sure to suspect who it was, and make the place too hot to hold us. *Caspita!* It’s not a question of choice, but a thing of necessity. *We must kill them!*”

Harry Blew hears the cold-blooded determination, comprehending it in all its terrible significance. It tells him the young officers are still in the town, and that these four men are about to waylay, rob, and murder them. What they mean by “getting back their money” is the only thing he does not comprehend. It is made clear as the conversation continues:

“I’m sure there’s nothing unfair in taking back our own. I, Frank Lara, say so. It was they who brought about the breaking of our bank, which was done in a mean dastardly way. The Englishman had the luck, and all the others of his kind went with him. But for that we could have held out. It’s no use our whining about it. We’ve lost, and must make good our losses best way we can. We can’t, and be safe ourselves, if we let these *gringos* go.”

“*Chingara!* we’ll stop their breath, and let there be no more words about it.”

The merciless verdict is in the voice of Don Manuel.

“You’re all agreed, then?” asks De Lara.

“*Si, si, si!*” is the simultaneous answer of assent, Calderon alone seeming to give it with reluctance; though he hesitates from timidity, not mercy.

Harry Blew now knows all. The officers have been gaming, have won money, and the four

fellows who talk so coolly of killing them are the chief gambler and his confederates.

What is he to do? How can he save the doomed men. Both are armed; Crozier has his sword, Cadwallader his dirk. Besides, the midshipman has a pistol, as he saw while they were talking to him at the Sailor's Home. But then they are to be taken unawares—shot, or struck down, in the dark without a chance of seeing the hand that strikes them! Even if warned and ready, it would be two against four. And he is himself altogether unarmed; for his jack-knife is gone—hypothecated to pay for his last jorum of grog! And the young officers have been drinking freely, as he gathers from what the ruffians say. They may be inebriated, or enough so to put them off their guard. Who would be expecting assassination? Who ever is, save a Mexican himself? Altogether unlikely that they should be thinking of such a thing. On the contrary, disregarding danger, they will come carelessly on, to

fall like ripe corn before the sickle of the reaper.

The thought of such a fate for his friends fills the sailor with keenest apprehension ; and again he asks himself how it is to be averted.

The four conspirators are not more than as many feet from the boat. By stretching out his hands he could grip them by the ankles, without altering his recumbent attitude one inch. And by doing this, he might give the guilty plotters such a scare as would cause them to retreat, and so baffle their design.

The thought comes before his mind, but is instantly abandoned. The fellows are not of the stuff to be frightened at shadows. By their talk, at least two are desperadoes, and to make known his presence would be only to add another victim to those already doomed to death.

But what is he to do ? For the third time

he asks himself this question, still unable to answer it.

While still painfully cogitating, his brain labouring to grasp some feasible plan of defence against the threatened danger, he is warned of a change. Some words spoken tell of it. It is De Lara who speaks them.

“By the way, *camarados*, we’re not in a good position here. They may sight us too soon. To make things sure we must drop on them before they can draw their weapons. Else some of us may get dropped ourselves.”

“Where could we be better? I don’t see. The shadow of this old boat favours us.”

“Why not crawl under it?” asks Calderon.
“There Argus himself couldn’t see us.”

Harry Blew’s heart beats at the double-quick. His time seems come, and he already fancies four pistols to his head, or the same number of poniards pointed at his ribs.

It is a moment of vivid anxiety—a crisis dread, terrible, almost agonizing.

Fortunately it is not of long duration, ending almost on the instant. He is relieved at hearing one of them say :

“No; that won’t do. We’d have trouble in scrambling out again. While about it they’d see or hear us, and take to their heels. You must remember, it’s but a step to where their boat will be waiting them, with some eight or ten of those big British tars in it. If they got there before we overtook them, the tables would be turned on us.”

“You’re right, Don Manuel,” rejoins De Lara; “it won’t do to go under the boat, and there’s no need for us to stay by it. *Mira!* yonder’s a better place — by that wall. In its shadow no one can see us, and the *gringos* must pass within twenty feet of it. It’s the very spot for our purpose. Have with me!”

No one objecting, the four separate from the side of the boat and glide silently as spectres

across the strip of sandy beach, their forms gradually growing indistinct in the fog, at length altogether disappearing beneath the sombre shadow of the wall.

CHAPTER VIII.

CRUSADERS, TO THE RESCUE.

“WHAT am I to do?”

It is the ex-man-o'-war's man, still lying under the launch, who thus interrogates himself. He has put the question for the fourth time that night and now emphatically as ever, but less despairingly.

True, the conspiring assassins have only stepped aside to a lurking place from which they may more conveniently pounce upon their quarry, and be surer of striking it. But their changed position has left him free to change his; which he at once determines upon doing. Their talk has told him where the man-of-war's boat will be awaiting to take the officers back to their ship. He knows the new wharf referred to, the very stair at

which the *Crusaders* have been accustomed to bring to.

It may be the cutter with her full crew of ten—or it may be but the gig. No matter which. There cannot be fewer than two oarsmen, and these will be sufficient. A brace of British tars, with himself to make three, and the officers to tot up five—that will be more than a match for four Spanish Californians. Four times four, thinks Harry Blew, even though the sailors, like himself, be unarmed, or with nothing but their knives and boat-hooks.

He has no fear, if he can but bring it to an encounter of this kind. The question is, can he do so? And first, can he creep out from under the launch, and steal away unobserved?

A glance of scrutiny towards the spot where the assassins have placed themselves in ambuscade, satisfies him that he can. The fog favours him. Through it he cannot see them; and should be himself equally invisible.

Another circumstance will be in his favour: on

the soft, sandy beach his footsteps will make but slight noise ; not enough to be heard above the hoarse continuous surging of the surf.

All this passes in a moment, and he has made up his mind to start ; but hesitates from a new apprehension. Will he be in time ? The stair at which the boat should lie is not over a quarter of a mile off, and will take but a few minutes to reach it. Even if he succeed in eluding the vigilance of the ambushed villains, will it be possible for him to get to the pier, communicate with the boat's crew, and bring them back, before the officers reach the place of ambush ?

To all this, the answer is doubtful, and the doubt appals him. In his absence, the young gentlemen may arrive at the fatal spot. He may return to find their bodies lying lifeless along the sand, their pockets rifled, their murderers gone !

The thought holds him irresolute, doubting what course to take. Should he remain till they are heard approaching, then rush out, give them such warning as he may, throw himself by their

side, and do his best to defend them? Unarmed, this would not be much. Against pistols and poniards he would scarce count as a combatant. It might but end in all three being slaughtered together!

But there is also the danger of his being discovered in his attempt to slip away from his place of concealment. He may be followed, and overtaken; though he has little fear of this. Pursued he may be, but not overtaken. Despite his sea-legs, he knows himself a swift runner. Were he assured of a fair start, he can hold his distance against anything Spanish or Californian. In five minutes he might reach the pier—in five more be back. If he find the *Crusaders* there, a word will warn them. In all it would take about ten minutes. But, meanwhile, Crozier and Cadwalader may get upon the ground, and one minute—half a minute—after all would be over.

A terrible struggle agitates the breast of the man-o'-war's man; in his thoughts is conflict agonizing. On either side are *pros* and *cons*,

requiring calm deliberation ; and there is no time to deliberate. He must act.

But one more second spends he in consideration. He has confidence in the young officers. Both are brave as lions, and if attacked, will make a tough fight of it. Crozier has also caution, on which dependence may be placed ; and at such a time of night he will not be going unguardedly. The strife, though unequal, might last long enough for him, Harry Blew, to bring the *Crusaders*—at least near enough to cry out—and cheer their officers with the hope of help at hand.

All this flits through Harry Blew's brain in a tenth part of the time it takes to tell it. And having resolved how to act, he hastens to carry out his resolution—to proceed in quest of the boat's crew.

Sprawling like a lizard from beneath the launch, he glides off silently along the strand. At first, with slow cautious steps, and crouchingly, but soon erect, in a rapid run, as if for the saving

of his life; for it is to save the lives of others, almost dear as his own.

The five minutes are not up, when his footsteps patter along the planking of the hollow wooden wharf; and in ten seconds after, he stands at the head of the sea-stairway, looking down.

Below is a boat with men in it—half-a-score of them—seated on the thwarts, some lolling over against the gunwales asleep. At a glance he can tell them to be *Crusaders*.

His hail startles them into activity; one and all recognizing the voice of their old shipmate.

“Quick!” he cries; “quick, mates! This way, and along with me! Don’t stay to ask questions. Enough for you to know that the lives of your officers are in danger.”

It proves enough. The tars don’t wait for a word more; but spring from their recumbent attitude, and out of the boat.

Rushing up the pier steps, they cluster around their comrade. They have not needed instructions to arm themselves. Harry’s speech, with its

tone, told of some shore hostility, and they have instinctively made ready to meet it; each laying hold of the weapon nearest to his hand; some a knife, some an oar, others a boat-hook.

“Heave with me, lads!” cries Harry; and they “heave”—at his heels—rushing after, as if to extinguish a fire in the forecastle.

Soon they are coursing along the strand, towards the upturned boat, silently, and without asking explanation. If they did, they could not get it; for their leader is panting, breathless, almost unable to utter a word. But five issues from his throat, jerked out disjointedly, and in hoarse utterance. They are:—

“Crozier—Cadwallader—waylaid—robbers—murderers!”

Enough to spur the *Crusaders* to their best speed, if *not* already at it. But they are; every man of them straining his strength to the utmost.

As they rush on, cleaving the thick fog, Harry at their head listens intently. As yet he can

distinguish no sound to alarm him; only the monotonous swashing of the sea, and the murmur of distant voices in the streets of the town. But no cries—no shouts, nor shots; nothing to tell of deadly strife.

“Thank the Lord!” says the brave sailor, half speaking to himself; “we’ll be in time to save them.”

The words have scarce passed from his lips, when he comes in sight of the capsized launch; and almost simultaneously sees two figures upon the beach beyond. They are of human shape, but through the fog looking grand as giants.

He is not beguiled by the deception; he knows it to be the two officers, their forms magnified by the mist. No others are likely to be coming that way; for he can see they are approaching; and, as can be told by their careless, swaggering gait, unsuspicious of danger, little dreaming of an ambuscade, that in ten seconds more may deprive them of existence!

To him, hurrying to avert this catastrophe, it

is a moment of intense apprehension—of dread chilling fear. He sees them almost up to the place where the assassins should spring out upon them. In another instant he may hear the cracking of pistols, and see flashes through the fogs. Expecting it even before he can speak, he nevertheless calls out :

“Avast there, Mr. Crozier ! We’re *Crusaders*. Stop where you are. Another step, and you’ll be shot at. There’s four men under that wall waiting to murder ye. D’ye know the names, Calderon and Lara ? It’s them !”

At the first words, the young officers—for it is they—instantly come to a stand. The more promptly from being prepared to expect an attack, but without the warning. Well timed it is ; and they have not stopped a moment too soon.

Simultaneous with the sailor’s last word, the sombre space under the wall is lit up by four flashes, followed by the report of as many pistols, while the “tzip-tzip” of bullets, like hornets

hurtle past their ears, leaving no doubt as to who has been fired at.

Fired at, and fortunately missed; for neither feels hurt nor hit!

But the danger is not yet over. Quick following the first comes a second volley, and again with like result. Bad marksmen are they who design doing murder.

It is the last round of shots. In all likelihood, the pistols of the assassins are double-barrelled, and both barrels have been discharged. Before they can reload them, Harry Blew, with his *Crusaders*, has come up, and it is too late for De Lara and his confederates to use the steel.

Crozier and Cadwallader bound forward; and placing themselves at the head of the boat's crew advance toward the shadowed spot. They go with a rush, resolved on coming to close quarters with their dastardly assailants, and bringing the affair to a speedy termination.

But it is over already, to their surprise, as also chagrin. On reaching the wall, they find nothing

there save stones and timber! The dark space for an instant illuminated by the pistol-flashes, has resumed its grim obscurity. The assassins have got away, escaping the chastisement they would surely have received had they stood their ground.

Some figures are seen in the distance, scuttling along a narrow lane. Cadwallader brings his pistol to bear on them, his finger upon the trigger. But it may not be they; and staid by the uncertainty, he refrains from firing.

“Let them go!” counsels Crozier. “’Twould be no use looking for them now. Their crime will keep till morning; and since we know their names, it’ll be strange if we can’t find them; though not so strange if we should fail to get them punished. But that they shall be, if there’s a semblance of law to be found in San Francisco. —Now, thanks, my brave *Crusaders*! And there’s a hundred pound note to be divided among you. Small reward for the saving of two lives, with a

large sum of money. Certainly, had you not turned up so opportunely—— But, Harry, how come you to be here? Never mind now! Let us get aboard! and you, Blew, must go with us. It'll do you no harm to spend one more night on your old ship. There you can tell me all."

Harry joyfully complies with a requisition so much to his mind; and, instead of tossing discontentedly on a couch of wet sand, he that night sleeps soundly in his old bunk in the frigate's fore-peak.

CHAPTER IX.

A NEGLECTED DWELLING.

A COUNTRY-HOUSE some ten miles from San Francisco, in a south-westerly direction. It stands inland about half-way between the Bay and the Pacific shore, among the Coast Range hills.

Though a structure of mud-brick—the sort made by the Israelites in Egypt—and with no pretension to architectural style, it is, in Californian parlance, a *hacienda*. For it is the headquarters of a grazing estate; but not one of the first class, either in stock or appointments. In these respects, it was once better off than now; since now it is less than second, showing signs of decay everywhere, but nowhere so much as in the dwelling itself, and the enclosures around. Its walls are weather-washed, here and there

cracked and crumbling; the doors have had no paint for years, and opening or shutting, creak upon hinges thickly coated with rust. Its *corrals* contain no cattle, nor are any to be seen upon the pastures outside. In short, the estate shows as if it had an absentee owner, or none at all.

And the house might appear uninhabited, but for some *peons* seen sauntering listlessly around, and a barefoot damsel or two, standing dishevelled by its door, or in the kitchen kneeling over the *metate*, and squeezing out maize-dough for the eternal *tortillas*.

However, despite its neglected appearance, the *hacienda* has an owner; and with all their indolence, the lounging *leperos* outside, and slatternly wenches within, have a master. He is not often at home, but when he is they address him as "Don Faustino." Servants rarely add the surname.

Only at rare intervals do his domestics see him. He spends nearly all his time elsewhere—most of it in Yerba Buena, now named San Fran-

cisco. And of late more than ever has he absented himself from his ancestral halls; for the *hacienda* is the house in which he was born; it, with the surrounding pasture-land, left him by his father, some time deceased.

Since coming into possession, he has neglected his patrimony; indeed, spent the greater portion of it on cards, and evil courses of other kinds; for the *dueño* of the ill-conditioned dwelling is Faustino Calderon.

As already hinted, his estate is heavily mortgaged, the house almost a ruin. In his absence, it looks even more like one; for then his domestics, having nothing to do, are scarce ever seen outside, to give the place an appearance of life. Fond of cards as their master, they may at most times be observed, squatted upon the pavement of the inner court, playing *monté* on a spread blanket, with copper *clacos* staked upon the game.

When the *dueño* is at home, things are a little different; for, Don Faustino, with all his

dissipation, is anything but an indulgent master. Then his *muchuchos* have to move about, and wait upon him with assiduity. If they don't, they will hear *carajos* from his lips, and receive cuts from his riding-whip.

It is the morning after that night when the El Dorado Monté bank suspended play and pay; the time, six o'clock A.M. Notwithstanding the early hour, the domestics are stirring about the place, as if they had something to do, and were doing it. To one acquainted with their usual habits, the brisk movement will be interpreted as a sure sign that their master is at home.

And he is; though he has been there but a very short while—only a few minutes. Absent for more than a week, he has this morning made his appearance just as the day was breaking. Not alone; but in the company of a gentleman, whom all the servants know to be his intimate friend and associate—Don Francisco de Lara.

The two have come riding up to the house in haste, dropped the bridles on the necks of their horses, and, without saying word, left these to the care of a couple of grooms, rudely roused from their slumber.

The house-servants, lazily drawing the huge door of the *saguan*, see that the dueño is in ill-humour, which stirs them into activity; and in haste, they prepare the repast called for—*desayuno*.

Having entered, and taken seats, Don Faustino and his guest await the serving of the meal.

For some time in silence, each with an elbow rested on the table, a hand supporting his head, the fingers buried in his hair.

The silence is at length broken; the host, as it should be, speaking first.

“What had we best do, De Lara? I don’t think ’twill be safe staying here. After what’s happened, they’re sure to come after us.”

“That’s probable enough. *Caspita!* I’m

puzzled to make out how that fellow who called out our names could have known we were there. '*Crusaders*,' he said they were; which means they were sailors belonging to the English war-ship. Of course the boat's crew that was waiting. But what brought them up; and how came they to arrive there and then, just in the nick of time to spoil our plans? That's a mystery to me."

"To me, too."

"There were no sailors hanging about the hotel, that I saw; nor did we encounter any as we went through the streets. Besides, if we had, they couldn't have passed us, and then come on from the opposite side, without our seeing them—dark as it was. 'Tis enough to make me believe in second-sight."

"That appears the only way to explain it."

"Yes; but it won't, and don't. I've been thinking of another explanation, more conformable to the laws of nature."

"What?"

“That there’s been somebody under that old boat. We stood talking there like four fools, calling out one another’s names. Now, suppose one of those sailors was waiting by the boat as we came along, and seeing us, crept under it? He could have heard everything we said; and slipping off, after we went to the wall, might have brought up the rest of the accursed crew. The thing seems odd; at the same time it’s possible enough, and probable too.”

“It is; and now you speak of it, I remember something. While we were under the wall, I fancied I saw a man crouching along the water’s edge, as if going away from the boat.”

“You did?”

“I’m almost certain I did. At the time, I thought nothing of it, as we were watching for the other two; and I had no suspicion of any one else being about. Now, I believe there was one.”

“And now, I believe so too. *Carramba!* that accounts for everything. I see it all. That’s how the sailor got our names, and knew all about our design—that to do—*murder!* You needn’t start at the word, nor turn pale. But you may at the prospect before us. *Carrai!* we’re in danger, Calderon;—no mistake about it. Why the devil didn’t you tell me of it—at the time you saw that man?”

“Because, as I’ve said, I had no thought it could be any one connected with them.”

“Well, your thoughtlessness has got us into a fix indeed—the worst I’ve ever been in, and I can remember a few. No use to think about duelling now, whoever might be challenger. Instead of seconds, they’d meet us with a posse of sheriff’s officers. Likely enough they’ll be setting them after us before this. Although I feel sure our bullets didn’t hit either, it’ll be just as bad. The attempt will tell against us all the same. Therefore, it won’t

do to stay here. So direct your servants not to unsaddle. We'll need to be off, soon as we've swallowed a cup of chocolate."

A call from Don Faustino brings one of his domestics to the door; then a word or two sends him off with the order for keeping the horses in hand.

"*Chingara!*" fiercely exclaims De Lara, striking the table with his shut fist, "everything has gone against us."

"Everything, indeed. Our money lost, our love made light of, our revenge baffled——"

"No, not the last! Have no fear, Faustino. That's still to come."

"How?"

"How! you ask, do you?"

"I do. I can't see what way we can get it now. You know the English officers will be gone in a day or two. Their ship is to sail soon. Last night there was talk in the town that she might leave at any moment—tomorrow, or it may be this very day."

“Let her go, and them with her. The sooner the better for us. That won’t hinder me from the revenge I intend taking. On the contrary, ’twill help me. Ha! I shall strike this Crozier in his tenderest part! and you can do the same for Señor Cadwallader.”

“In what way?”

“Faustino Calderon, I won’t call you a fool, notwithstanding your behaviour last night. But you ask some very silly questions, and that’s one of them. Supposing these *gringos* gone from here, does it follow they’ll take everything along with them? Can you think of nothing they must needs leave behind?”

“Their hearts. Is that what you mean?”

“No, it isn’t.”

“What, then?”

“Their sweethearts, stupid! And that brings me to what I intend telling you—leastwise to the first chapter of it.”

“Which is?”

“That somebody else is going away, too?”

“Who?”

“Don Gregorio Montijo!”

“Don Gregorio Montijo?”

“Don Gregorio, daughter, and granddaughter.”

“You astonish me! But are they leaving California for good?”

“Leaving it for good.”

“That is strange intelligence, startling! Though I can understand the reason; that’s well known.”

“Oh, yes; the Don’s disgusted with things as they now go here; and I suppose the señoritas are also. No wonder. Since these ragged and red-shirted gentry have taken possession of the place, it’s not very agreeable for ladies to show themselves about; nor very safe, I should say. Good reason for Don Gregorio selling out, and betaking himself to quieter quarters.”

“He has sold out, has he?”

“He has.”

“You’re sure of it?”

“Quite sure. Rafael Rocas has told me all about it. And for an enormous sum of money. How much do you suppose?”

“Perhaps \$100,000. His property ought to be worth that.”

“Whether it ought to be, or is, it has realized three times the amount.”

“*Carramba!* Has Rocas said so?”

“He has.”

“Has he told you who the generous purchaser is?”

“Some speculating Yankees, who fancy they see far into the future, and think Don Gregorio’s pasture-land a good investment. There’s a partnership of purchasers, I believe, and they’ve paid the money down, in cash.”

“Already! What kind of cash?”

“The best kind—doubloons and dollars. Not all in coin. Some of it in the currency of California—gold-dust and nuggets.”

“That’s quite as good. *Santissima!* a splendid fortune. All for a piece of pasture-land, that twelve months ago wasn’t worth a tenth part the amount! What a pity, my own acres are already hypothecated! I might have been a millionaire.”

“No! your land lies too far off. These Yankees have bought Don Gregorio’s land for “town-lots,” as they call them. In due time, no doubt, they’ll cover them with their psalm-singing churches and schoolhouses—though the first building put up should be a prison.”

Both laugh together at this modest *jeu d’esprit*; their mirth having a double significance. For neither need be over-satisfied with the sight of a prison.

“By the Virgin!” exclaims Calderon, continuing the conversation; “Don Gregorio has done well, and he may be wise in quitting California. But what the devil are we to do about the girls? Of course, as you say, they’re going too!”

“And so it may be. But not before another event takes place—one that may embarrass, and delay, if it do not altogether prevent their departure.”

“*Amigo* ; you talk enigmatically. Will you oblige me by speaking plainer ? ”

“I will ; but not till we’ve had our chocolate, and after it a *copita* of Catalan. I need a little alcohol to get my brain in working order ; for there’s work for it to do. Enough now to tell you I’ve had a revelation. A good angel—or it may be a bad one—has visited me, and given it. A vision which shows me at the same time riches and revenge—pointing the straight way to both.”

“Has the vision shown, that I’m to be a sharer in these fine things ? ”

“It has ; and you shall be. But only in proportion as you may prove yourself worthy.”

“*Por Dios !* I’ll do my best. I have the will, if you’ll only instruct me in the way.”

“I’ll do that. But I warn you, ’twill need

more than will—strength, secrecy, courage, determination.”

“*Desayuno, señores!*”

This from one of the domestics announcing the chocolate served.

CHAPTER X.

MYSTERIOUS COMMUNICATIONS.

A FEW moments suffice the ruined gamblers for their slight matutinal repast. After which, a decanter of Catalonian brandy and glasses are placed upon the table, with a bundle of Manilla cheroots, size number one.

While the glasses are being filled, and the cigars lighted, there is silence. Then Calderon calls upon his guest to impart the particulars of that visionary revelation, which promises to give them, at the same time, riches and revenge.

Taking a sip of the potent spirit, and a puff or two at his cigar, De Lara responds to the call. But first leaning across the table, and looking his confederate straight in the face, he asks, in an odd fashion :

“ Are you a bankrupt, Faustino Calderon ? ”

“Of course I am. Why do you put the question?”

“Because I want to be sure, before making known to you the scheme I’ve hinted at. As I’ve told you, I’m after no child’s play. I ask again, *are* you a bankrupt?”

“And I answer you I *am*. But what has that to do with it?”

“A good deal. Never mind. You *are* one? You assure me of it?”

“I do. I’m as poor as yourself, if not poorer, after last night’s losses. I’d embarked all my money in the Monté concern.”

“But you have something besides money? This house, and your lands?”

“Mortgaged—months ago—up to the eyes, the ears, the crown of the head. That’s where the cash came from to set up the bank that’s broke—breaking me along with it.”

“And you’ve nothing left? No chance for starting it again?”

“Not a *claco*. Here I am apparently in my

own house, with servants, such as they are, around me. It's all in appearance. In reality, I'm not the owner. I once was, as my father before me; but can't claim to be any longer. Even while we're sitting here, drinking this Catalan, the mortgagee—that old usurer Martinez—may step in and turn—kick us both out.”

“I'd like him to try. He'd catch a Tartar, if he attempted to kick me out—he or anybody else just now, in my present humour. There's far more reason for us to fear being pulled out by policemen, which makes it risky to stay talking. So let's to the point at once—back to where we left off. On your oath, Faustino Calderon, you're no longer a man of means?”

“On my oath, Francisco de Lara, I haven't an *onza* left—no, not a *peso*.”

“Enough. Now that I know your financial status, we will understand one another; and without further circumlocution I shall make you a sharer of the bright thought that's flashed across my brain.”

“Let me hear what it is. I’m all impatience.”

“Not so fast, Faustin. As I’ve already twice told you, it’s no child’s play; but a business that requires skill and courage. Above all, fidelity among those who may engage in it—for more than two are needed. It will want at least four good and true men. I know three of them; about the fourth I’m not so certain.”

“Who are the three?”

“Francisco de Lara, Manuel Diaz, and Rafael Rocas.”

“And the fourth, of whom you are dubious?”

“Faustino Calderon.”

“Why do you doubt me, De Lara?”

“Don’t call it doubting. I only say I’m not certain about you.”

“But for what reason?”

“Because you may be squeamish, or get scared. Not that there’s much real danger. There mayn’t be any, if the thing’s cleverly managed. But there must be no bungling; and, above all, no backing out—nothing like treason.”

“Can’t you trust me so far as to give a hint of your scheme? As to my being squeamish, I think, De Lara, you do me injustice to suppose such a thing. The experience of the last twenty-four hours has made a serious change in my way of viewing matters of morality. A man who has lost his all, and suddenly sees himself a beggar, isn’t disposed to be sensitive. Come, *camarado*! tell me, and try me.”

“I intend doing both, but not just yet. It’s an affair that calls for certain formalities, among them some *swearing*. Those who embark in it must be bound by a solemn oath; and when we all get together, that shall be done. Time enough then for you to know what I’m aiming at. Now, I can only say, that if the scheme succeed, two things are sure, and both concern yourself, Faustino Calderon.”

“What are they? You can trust me with that much, I suppose?”

“Certainly I can, and shall. The first is, that you’ll be a richer man than you’ve ever been

in your life, or at least since I've had the honour of your acquaintance. The second, that Don Gregorio Montijo will not leave California—that is not quite so soon, nor altogether in the way he is wishing. You may have plenty of time yet, with opportunities, to press your suit with the fair Inez."

"*Carramba!* Secure me that, and I swear"—

"You needn't set about swearing yet. You can do that when the occasion calls for it; and, I promise, you shall have the opportunity soon. Till then, I'll take your word. With one in love, as you believe yourself, that should be binding as any oath; especially when it promises such a rich reward."

"You're sure about Diaz and Rocas?"

"Quite so. With them there won't be need for any prolonged conference. When a man sees the chance of getting sixty thousand dollars in a lump lot, he's pretty certain to act promptly, and without being particular as to what that action is."

“Sixty thousand dollars! That’s to be the share of each?”

“That, and more, maybe.”

“It makes one crazy—even to think of such a sum!”

“Don’t go crazed till you’ve got it; then you may.”

“If I do, it won’t be with grief.”

“It shouldn’t; since it will give you a fresh lease of sweet life; and renew your hopes of having the wife you want. But come! we must get away if we wish to avoid being taken away—though, I fancy, there’s nothing to apprehend for some hours yet. The gringos have gone on board their ship, and are not likely to come ashore again before breakfast. What with their last night’s revelry, it’ll take them some time to clear the cobwebs out of their eyes after waking up. Besides, if they should make it a law matter, there’ll be all the business of looking up warrants, and the like. They do such things rather slowly in San Francisco. Then

there's the ten miles out here ; even if they strike our trail straight. No ; we needn't be in a hurry so far as that goes. But the other's a thing that won't keep, and must be set about at once. Fortunately, the road that takes us to a place of concealment, is the same we have to travel upon business ; and that is to the rancho of Rocas. There I've appointed to meet Diaz, who'd have come with us here, but that he preferred staying all night in the town. But he'll be there betimes, and we can all remain with old Rafael, till this ugly wind blows past ; which it will in a week, or soon as the English ship sails off. If not, we must keep out of sight a little longer, or leave San Francisco for good."

"I hope we'll not be forced to that. I shouldn't at all like to leave it."

"Like it or not, you may have no choice. And what does it signify where a man lives, so long as he's got sixty thousand dollars to live on ?"

“ True ; that ought to make any place pleasant.”

“ Well ; I tell you you’ll have it—maybe more. But not if we stand palavering here. *Nos vamos !*”

A call from Calderon summons a servant, who is directed to have the horses brought to the door.

These soon appear, under the guidance of two ragged grooms ; who, delivering them, see their masters mount, and ride off, they know not whither ; nor care they, so long as they are themselves left to idleness, with a plentiful supply of black beans, jerked-meat, and *monté*.

Soon the two horsemen disappear behind a ridge of hills ; and the hypothecated house resumes its wonted look of desolation.

CHAPTER XI.

A CONVERSATION WITH QUADRUMANA.

NOTWITHSTANDING his comfortable quarters in the frigate's forecastle, Harry Blew is up by early daybreak, and off from the ship before six bells have sounded.

Ere retiring to rest, he had communicated to his patron, Crozier, a full account of his zigzag wanderings through the streets of San Francisco, and how he came to bring the cutter's crew to the rescue.

As neither of the young officers is on the early morning watch, but both still abed, he does not await their rising. For, knowing that the adage, "First come, first served," is often true, he is anxious as soon as possible to present himself at the office of the agent Silvestre, and from him get directions for going on board

the Chilian ship. He is alive to the hint given him by Crozier, that there may be a chance of his being made a mate.

As yet he does not even know the name of the vessel, but that he will learn at the office, as also where she is lying.

His request to the lieutenant on duty for a boat to set him ashore, is at once, and willingly granted. No officer on that frigate would refuse Harry Blew; and the dingy is placed at his service.

In this he is conveyed to the wooden pier, whose planking he treads with heavier step, but lighter heart, than when, on the night before, he ran along it in quest of *Crusaders*. With weightier purse too, as he carries a hundred pound Bank of England note in the pocket of his pea-jacket—a parting gift from the generous Crozier—besides a number of gold pieces received from Cadwallader, as the young Welshman's share of gratitude for the service done them.

Thus amply provided, he might proceed at once to the "Sailor's Home," and bring away his embargoed property.

He does not; thinking it better first to see about the berth on the Chilian ship; and therefore he steers direct for the agent's office.

Though it is still early, by good luck, Don Tomas chances to be already at his desk; to whom Harry hands the card given him by Crozier, at the same time declaring the purpose for which he has presented himself.

In return, he receives from Silvestre instructions to report himself on board the Chilian ship, *El Condor*; Don Tomas furnishing him with a note of introduction to her captain, and pointing out the vessel—which is visible from the door, and at no great distance off.

"Captain Lantanas is coming ashore," adds the agent; "I expect him in the course of an hour. By waiting here, you can see him, and it will save you boat-hire."

But Harry Blew will not wait. He remembers the old saying about procrastination, and is determined there shall be no mishap through negligence on his part, or niggardliness about a bit of a boat-fare. He has made up his mind to be the *Condor's* first-mate—if he can.

“Nor is it altogether ambition that prompts him to seek the office so earnestly. A nobler sentiment inspires him—the knowledge, that, in this capacity, he may be of more service, and better capable of affording protection, to the fair creatures whom Crozier has committed to his charge.”

The watermen of San Francisco do not ply their oars gratuitously. Even the shabbiest of shore-boats, hired for the shortest time, exacts a stiffish fare. It will cost Harry Blew a couple of dollars to be set aboard the *Condor*, though she is lying scarce three cables' length from the shore!

What cares he for that? It is nothing now.

Hailing the nearest skiff with a waterman in it, he points to the Chilian ship, saying :

“Heave along, lad ; an’ put me aboard o’ yonder craft—that one as shows the three-colour bit o’ buntin’ wi’ a single star in the blue. The sooner ye do your job, the better ye’ll get paid for it.”

A contract on such conditions is usually entered into with alacrity, and with celerity carried out. The boatman beaches his tiny craft, takes in his fare, and in less than ten minutes’ time, Harry Blew swarms up the man-ropes of the Chilian ship, strides over the rail, and drops down upon her deck.

He looks around, but sees no one—at least nothing in the shape of a sailor. Only an old negro, with skin black as a boot, and crow-footed all over the face, standing beside two singular creatures nearly as human-like as himself, but covered with fox-coloured hair !

The ex-man-o’-war’s man is for a time in doubt as to which of the three he should address

himself. In point of intelligence there seems not much to choose. However, he with the black skin cuts short his hesitation by stepping forward, and saying :

“ Well, mass’r sailor-man, wha’ you come for ? S’pose you want see de capen. I’s only de cook.”

“ Oh, you’re only the cook, are you ? Well, old caboose ; you’ve made a correct guess about my bizness. It’s the capten I do want to see.”

“ All right. He down in de cabin. You wait hya. I foteh ’im up less’n no time ! ”

The old darkey shuffling aft, disappears down the companion-way, leaving Harry with the two monstrous-looking creatures, whom he has now made out to be orang-otangs.

“ Well, mates ! ” says the sailor, addressing them in a jocular way, “ what be your opeenyun o’ things in general ? ” D’ye think the wind’s goin’ to stay sou’-westerly, or shift roun’ to the nor’-eastart ? ”

“ Cro—cro—croak ! ”

“ Oh, hang it, no. I ain’t o’ the croakin’ sort. Ha’n’t ye got nothin’ more sensible than that to say to me ? ”

“ Kurra—kra—kra. Cro—cro—croak ! ”

“ No ; I won’t do anythink o’ the kind ; leastways, unless there turns out to be short commons ’board this eer craft. Then I’ll croak, an’ no mistake. But I say, old boys, how ’bout the grog ? Reg’lar allowance, I hope—three tots a day ? ”

“ Na—na—na—na—na—boof ! Ta—ta—ta—fuff ! ”

“ No ! only two, ye say ! Ah ! that won’t do for me. For ye see, shipmates—I s’pose I shall be callin’ ye so—’board the old *Crusader*, I’ve been ’customed to have my rum reg’lar, three times the day ; an’ if it ain’t same on the *Condor*, in the which I’m ’bout to ship, then, shiver my spars ! if I don’t raise sich a rumpus as —— ”

“ Kurra—kurra—cr—cro—croak ! Na—na—na—boof—ta—ta—pf—pf—piff ! ”

The sailor’s voice is drowned by the gibbering

of the oranges, his gesture of mock-menace, with the semi-serious look that accompanied it, having part frightened, part infuriated them.

The fracas continues, until the darkey returns on deck, followed by the skipper; when the cook takes charge of the *quadrumana*, drawing them off to his caboose.

Captain Lantanas, addressing himself to the sailor, asks: “*Un marinero?*” [A seaman?]

“*Si, capitan.*” [Yes, captain.]

“*Que negocio tienes V. commigo?*” [What is your business with me?]

“Well, capten,” responds Harry Blew, speaking the language of the Chilian, in a tolerably intelligible *patois*, “I’ve come to offer my saryices to you. I’ve brought this bit o’ paper from Master Silvestre; it’ll explain things better’n I can.”

The captain takes the note handed to him, and breaks open the envelope. A smile irradiates his sallow face as he makes himself acquainted with its contents.

“At last a sailor!” he mutters to himself; for Harry is the only one who has yet offered. “And a good one too,” thinks Captain Lantanas, bending his eyes on the ex-man-o’-war’s man, and scanning him from head to foot.

But, besides personal inspection, he has other assurance of the good qualities of the man before him; at a late hour on the night before he held communication with Don Gregorio, who has recommended him. The haciendado had reported what Crozier said, that Harry Blew was an able seaman, thoroughly trustworthy, and competent to take charge of a ship, either as first or second officer.

With Crozier’s endorsement thus vicariously conveyed, the ex-man-o’-war’s man has no need to say a word for himself. Nor does Captain Lantanas call for it. He only puts some professional questions, less inquisitorially, than as a matter of form.

“The Señor Silvestre advises me that you wish to serve in my ship. Can you take a lunar?”

“Well, capten; I hev squinted through a quadrant afores now, an’ can take a sight; tho’ I arn’t much up to loonars. But if there’s a good chronometer aboard, I won’t let a ship run very far out o’ her reck’nin’.”

“You can keep a log-book, I suppose?”

“I dar say I can. I’ve larned to write, so ’st might be read; tho’ my fist an’t much to be bragged about.”

“That will do,” rejoins the skipper, contentedly. “Now, Señor Enrique—I see that’s your name—answer me in all candour. Do you think you are capable of acting as *piloto*?”

“By that you mean mate, I take it?”

“Yes; it is *piloto* in Spanish.”

“Well, capten; ’tain’t for me to talk big o’ myself. But I’ve been over thirty year ’board a British man-o’-war—more’n one o’ ’em—an’ if I wan’t able to go mate in a merchanter, I ought to be condemned to be cook’s scullion for the rest o’ my days. If your honour thinks me worthy o’ bein’ made first-officer o’ the *Condor*, I’ll answer

for it she won't stray far out o' her course, while my watch be on."

"*Bueno!* Señor Enrique—B—blee. What is it?" asks the Chilian, re-opening the note, and vainly endeavouring to pronounce the Saxon surname.

"Blew—Harry Blew."

"Ah, Bloo—*azul, esta?*"

"No, capten. Not that sort o' blue. In Spanish, my name has a diff'rent significance. It means, as we say o' a gale after it's blowed past—it 'blew.' When it's been a big un, we say it 'blew great guns.' Now ye understan'?"

"Yes; perfectly. Well, Señor Bloo, to come to an understanding about the other matter. I'm willing to take you as my first-officer, if you don't object to the wages I intend offering you—fifty dollars a month, and everything found."

"I'm agreeable to the tarms."

"*Basta!* When will it be convenient for you to enter on your duties?"

"For that matter, this minute. I only need to

go ashore to get my kit. When that's stowed, I'll be ready to tackle on to work."

"*Muy bien!* señor; you can take my boat for it. And if you see any sailors who want to join, I authorize you to engage them at double the usual wages. I wish to get away, as soon as a crew can be shipped. But when you come back, we'll talk more about it. Call at Señor Silvestre's office, and tell him he needn't look for me till a later hour. Say I've some business that detains me aboard. *Hasta Luego!*"

Thus courteously concluding, the Chilean skipper returns to his cabin, leaving the newly appointed *piloto* free to look after his own affairs.

CHAPTER XII.

THE "BLUE-PETER."

THE ex-man-o'-war's man, now first-officer of a merchant vessel, and provided with a boat of his own, orders off the skiff he has kept in waiting, after tossing into it two dollars—the demanded fare. Then slipping down into the *Condor's* gig, sculls himself ashore.

Leaving his boat at the pier, he first goes to the office of the ship-agent, and delivers the message entrusted to him.

After that, contracting with a truckman, he proceeds to the "Sailor's Home," releases his *impedimenta*, and starts back to embark them in his boat. But not before giving the bar-keeper, as also the Boniface, of that establishment, a bit of his mind.

Spreading before their eyes the crisp hundred

pound note, which as yet he has not needed to break, he says tauntingly :

“Take a squint at that, ye land-lubbers ! There’s British money for ye. An’ tho’ ’t be but a bit o’ paper, it’s worth more than your gold-dross, dollar for dollar. How’d ye like to lay your ugly claws on’t ? Ah ! your’re a pair of the most dastardly shore-sharks I’ve met in all *my* cruzins ; but ye’ll never have Harry Blew in your groups again.”

Saying this, he thrusts the bank-note back into his pocket ; then paying them a last reverence with mock-politeness, and giving a twitch of his trousers, he starts after the truckman, already *en route* with his kit.

In accordance with the wishes of Captain Lantanas, he stays a little longer in the town, trying to pick up sailors. There are plenty of these sauntering along the streets and lounging at the doors of drinking saloons.

But even double wages will not tempt them to abandon their free-and-easy life ; and the *Condor’s*

first-officer is forced to the conclusion, that he must return to the ship *solus*.

Assisted by the truckman, he gets his traps into the gig; and is about to step in himself, when his eye chances to turn upon the *Crusader*. There he sees something to surprise him—the *Blue-Peter*. The frigate has out signals for sailing! and he wonders at this; for there was no word of it when he was aboard. He knew, as all the others, that she was to sail soon—it might be in a day or two. But not as the signal indicates,—almost immediately!

While conjecturing what may be the cause of such hasty departure, he sees something that partly explains it. Three or four cables' length from the frigate is another ship, over whose taffrail floats the flag of England. At a glance, the ex-man-o'-war's man can tell her to be a corvette; at the same time recalling what, the night before, he has heard upon the frigate: that the coming of the corvette would be the signal for the *Crusader's* sailing.

While his heart warms to the flag thus doubly displayed in the harbour of San Francisco, it is a little saddened to see the other signal—the “Blue-Peter;” since it tells him he may not have an opportunity to take a more formal leave of his friends of the frigate, which he designed doing. He longs to make known to Mr. Crozier and the midshipman the result of his application to the captain of the Chilian ship, and receive the congratulations of the young officers on his success; but now it may be impossible to communicate with them, by the *Crusader* so soon leaving port.

He has half a mind to put off for the frigate in the *Condor's* gig, into which he has got. But Captain Lantanas might, meanwhile, be wanting both him, and the boat.

All at once, in the midst of his dilemma, he sees that which promises to help him out of it,—a small boat putting off from the frigate's sides, and heading right for the pier.

As it draws nearer, he can tell it to be the dingy.

There are three men in it—two rowers and a steersman.

As it approaches the pier-head, Harry recognizes the one in the stern-sheets, whose bright, ruddy face is turned towards him.

"Thank the Lord for such good luck!" he mutters. "It's Mr. Cadwallader!"

By this the dingy has drawn near enough for the midshipman to see, and identify him; which he does, exclaiming in joyful surprise:

"By Jove! it's Blew himself! Hallo there, Harry! You're just the man I'm coming ashore to see.—Hold, starboard oar! Port oar, a stroke or two! Way enough!"

In a few seconds, the dingy is bow on to the gig; when Harry, seizing hold of it, brings the two boats side by side, and steadies them.

"Glad to see ye again, Master Willie. I'd just sighted the frigate's signal for sailin', an' despaired o' havin' the chance to say a last word to yourself, or Mr. Crozier."

"Well, old boy; it's about that I've come

ashore. Jump out ; and walk with me a bit along the wharf."

The sailor drops his oar, and springs out upon the pier, the young officer preceding him.

When sufficiently distant from the boats to be beyond ear-shot of the oarsmen, Cadwallader resumes speech :

"Harry ; here's a letter from Mr. Crozier. He wants you to deliver it, at the address you'll find written upon it. To save you the necessity of inquiring, I can point out the place it's to go to. Look along shore. You see a house—yonder on the top of the hill?"

"Sartinly, I see it, Master Willie ; and know who lives theer. Two o' the sweetest creeturs in all Californey. I s'pose the letter be for one o' them?"

"No, it isn't, you dog ; for neither of them. Read the superscription. You see it's addressed to a gentleman?"

"Oh ! it's for the guv'nor his-self," rejoins Harry, taking the letter, and running his eye

over the direction—Don Gregorio Montijo. "All right, sir. I'll put it in the old gentleman's flippers safe an' sure. Do you want me to go with it now, sir?"

"Well, as soon as you conveniently can; though there's no need for helter-skelter haste, since there wouldn't be time for an answer, anyhow. In twenty minutes we'll weigh anchor, and be off. I've hurried ashore to see you, hoping to find you at the ship-agent's office. How fortunate my stumbling on you here! For now I can better tell you what's wanted. In that letter, there's something that concerns Mr. Crozier and myself—matters of importance to us both. When you've given it to Don Gregorio, he'll no doubt ask you some questions about what happened last night. Tell him all you know; except that you needn't say anything of Mr. Crozier and myself having taken a little too much champagne—which we did. You understand, old boy?"

"Parfitly, Master Will."

“Good. Now, Harry; I haven’t another moment to stay. See! The ship’s beginning to spread canvas! If I don’t get back directly, I may be left here in California, never to rise above the rank of reefer. Oh! by the way, you’ll be pleased to know that your friend Mr. Crozier is now a lieutenant. His commission arrived by the corvette that came in last night. He told me to tell you, and I’d nearly forgotten it.”

“I’m gled to hear it,” rejoins the sailor, raising the hat from his head, and giving a subdued cheer; “right gled; an’, maybe, he’ll be the same, hearin’ Harry Blew’s been also promoted. I’m now first-mate o’ the Chili ship, Master Willie.”

“Hurrah! I congratulate you on your good luck. I’m delighted to know that, and so will he be. We may hope some day to see you a full-fledged skipper, commanding your own craft. Now, you dear old salt, don’t forget to look well after the girls. Again, good-bye, and God bless you!”

A squeeze of hands, with fingers entwined, tight as a reef-knot—then relaxed with reluctance—after which they separate.

The mid, jumping into the dingy, is rowed back towards the *Crusader*; while Harry re-hires the truckman; but now only to stay by, and take care of his boat, till he can return to it, after executing the errand entrusted to him. Snug as his new berth promises to be, he would rather lose it than fail to deliver that letter.

And in ten minutes after, he has passed through the suburbs of the town, and is hastening along the shore-road, towards the house of Don Gregorio Montijo.

CHAPTER XIII.

DREADING A "DESAFIO."

ONCE more upon the *azotea* stand Carmen Montijo and Iñez Alvarez.

It is the morning of the day succeeding that made sacred by their betrothal. Their eyes are upon the huge war-ship, that holds the men who hold their hearts, with promise of their hands—in short, every hope of their life's happiness.

They could be happy now, but for an apprehension which oppresses them—causing them keen anxiety. Yesterday, with its scenes of pleasurable excitement, had also its incidents of the opposite kind; the remembrance of which too vividly remains, and is not to be got rid of. The encounter between the gamblers and their lovers cannot end with that episode, to which they were

themselves witness. Something more will surely come from it.

And what will this something be? What should it? What could it, but a *desafio*—a duel?

However brave on yester-morn the two señoritas were, or pretended to be, however regardless of consequences, it is different to-day. The circumstances have changed. Then, their sweethearts were only suitors. Now, they are affianced, still standing in the relationship of lovers, but with ties more firmly, if not more tenderly, united. For are they not now their own.

Of the two girls, Iñez is less anxious than the aunt, having less cause to be. With the observant intelligence of woman, she has long since seen that Calderon is a coward, and for this reason has but little belief he will fight. With instinct equally keen, Carmen knows De Lara will. After his terrible humiliation, he is not the man to shrink away out of sight. Blackleg though he be, he possesses courage—perhaps the only

quality he has deserving of admiration. Once, she herself admired the quality, if not the man ! That remembrance itself makes her fear what may come.

She talks in serious tone, discussing with her niece the probabilities of what may arise. The delirious joy of yester-eve—of that hour when she sat in her saddle, looking over the ocean, and listening to the sweet words of love—is to-day succeeded by depression, almost despondency.

While conversing, she has her eyes upon the bay, watching the boats that, at intervals, are rowed off from the war-ship, fearing to recognize in one the form of him so dear. Fearing it ; for they know that her lover is not likely to be ashore again, and his coming now could only be on that errand she, herself, so much dreads—the duel. Duty should retain him on his, the young officer's, ship, but honour may require him once more to visit the shore—perhaps never to leave it alive !

Thus gloomily reflects Carmen, imparting her fears to the less frightened Inez ; though she too

is not without apprehension. If they but understood the "Code of Signals," all this misery would be spared them. Since from the frigate's main-royal masthead floats a blue flag, with a white square in its centre, which is a portent she will soon spread her sails, and glide off out of sight—carrying their *amantes* beyond all danger of duels, or shore-scrapes of any kind.

They observe the "Blue-Peter," but without knowing aught of its significance. They do not even try to interpret, or think of, it; their thoughts, as their eyes, concentrated upon the boats that pass between ship and shore.

One at length specially arrests their attention, and keeps it for some time fixed. A small craft, that leaving the ship, is steered direct for the town. It passes near enough for them to see there are three men in it; two of them rowing, the other in the stern—this last in the uniform of an officer.

Love's glance is keen, and, aided by an opera-glass, it enables Iñez Alvarez to identify the

officer in the stern sheets as Don Gulielmo. The other two—the oarsmen—are only sailors in blue serge shirts, with wide collars, falling far back.

For what the young officer is being rowed ashore, the ladies cannot guess. If for fighting, they know that another, and older, officer, would be with him. Where is Don Eduardo ?

While still conjecturing, the boat glides on towards the town, and is lost to their view behind some sand-hills inshore.

Their glance going back to the ship, they perceive a change in her aspect. Her tall tapering masts, with their net-work of stays and shrouds, are half-hidden behind broad sheets of canvas. The frigate is unfurling sail !

They are surprised at this, not expecting it so soon. With the help of their glasses, they observe other movements going on aboard the war-vessel: signal-flags running up and down their halyards, while boats are being hoisted to the davits.

While still watching these manœuvres, the

little craft which carries the midshipman again appears, shooting out from behind the sand-hills, and rowed rapidly back to the ship, the young officer still in it.

On reaching the great leviathan, for a short time it shows like a tiny spot along her water-line; but, soon after, it too is lifted aloft, and over the bulwark rail.

Ignorant as the young ladies may be of nautical matters, they can have no doubt as to what all this manœuvring means. The ship is about to sail!

As this is an event which interests all the family, Don Gregorio, summoned to the house-top, soon stands beside them.

"She's going off, sure enough," he says, after sighting through one of the glasses. "It's rather strange—so abruptly!" he adds. "Our young friends said nothing about it last night."

"I think they could not have known of it themselves," says Carmen.

“I’m sure they couldn’t,” adds Iñez.

“What makes you sure, *niña*?” asked Don Gregorio.

“Well—because”—stammers out the Andalusian, a flush starting into her cheeks—
“because they’d have told us. They said they didn’t expect to sail for a day or two, anyhow.”

“Just so; but you see they’re setting sail now—evidently intending to take departure. However, I fancy I can explain it. You remember they spoke of another war-ship they expected to arrive. Yonder it is! It came into port last night, and, in all likelihood, has brought orders for the *Crusader* to sail at once. I only wish it was the *Condor*! I shan’t sleep soundly till we’re safe away from——”

“See!” interrupts Carmen; “is not that a sailor coming this way?”

She points to a man, moving along the shore-road in the direction of the house.

"I think so," responds Don Gregorio, after a glance through the glass. "He appears to be in seaman's dress."

"Would he be coming here?" inquires Carmen, naïvely.

"I shouldn't be surprised; probably with a message from our young friends. It may be the man they recommended to me."

"That's why somebody went ashore in the little boat," whispers Iñez to her aunt. "He's bringing us *billetitas*. I was sure they wouldn't go away without leaving a last little word."

Iñez' speech imparts no information: for Carmen has been surmising in the same strain.

She replies by one of those proverbs, in which the Spanish tongue is so rich:

"*Silencio! hay Moros en la costa*"—(Silence! there are Moors on the coast).

While this bit of by-play is being carried on, the sailor ascends the hill, and is seen entering at the road-gate. There can now be

no uncertainty as to his calling. The blue jacket, broad shirt-collar, round-ribboned hat, and bell-bottomed trousers, are all the unmistakable toggery of a tar.

Advancing up the avenue in a rolling gait, with an occasional tack from side to side—that almost fetches him up among the manzanitas—he at length reaches the front of the house. There stopping, and looking up to the roof, he salutes those upon it, by removing his hat, giving a back-scrape with his foot, and a pluck at one of his brow locks.

“*Que quieres V., señor?*”—(What is your business, sir?), asks the hacendado, speaking down to him.

Harry Blew—for it is he—replies by holding out a letter, at the same time saying:

“Your honour; I’ve brought this for the master o’ the house.”

“I am he. Go in through that door you see below. I’ll come down to you.”

Don Gregorio descends the *escalera*, and meet-

ing the messenger in the inner court, receives the letter addressed to him.

Breaking it open he reads :

ESTIMABLE SIR—Circumstances have arisen that take us away from San Francisco sooner than we expected. The corvette that came into port last night brought orders for the *Crusader* to sail at once ; though our destination is the same as already known to you—the Sandwich Islands. As the ship is about to weigh anchor, I have barely time to write a word for myself, and Mr. Cadwallader. We think it proper to make known some circumstances which will, no doubt, cause you surprise, as they did ourselves. Yesterday morning we met at your house two gentlemen—as courtesy would then have required me to call them—by name Francisco de Lara and Faustino Calderon. We encountered them at a later hour of the day ; when an occurrence took place, which absolved us from either thinking of them as gentlemen,

or treating them as such. And still later, after leaving your hospitable roof, we, for the third time, came across the same two individuals, under circumstances showing them to be *professional gamblers*! In fact we found them to be the proprietors of a Monté bank in the notorious El Dorado; one of them actually engaged in dealing the cards! A spirit of fun, with perhaps a spice of mischief, led me into the play, and betting largely, I succeeded in breaking their bank. After that, for a short while we lost sight of them. But as we were making our way to the pier, where our boat was to meet us, we had a fourth interview with these “gentlemen;” who on this occasion appeared with two others in the character of *robbers* and *assassins*! That they did not succeed in either robbing or murdering us, is due to the brave fellow who will bear this letter to you—the sailor of whom I spoke. He can give you all the particulars of the last, and latest, encounter with the versatile indi-

viduals, who claim acquaintance with you. You may rely on his truthfulness. I have no time to say more.

Hoping to see you in Cadiz, please convey parting compliments to the señoritas—from the Señor Cadwallader and yours faithfully,

EDWARD CROZIER.

The letter makes a painful impression on the mind of Don Gregorio. Not that he is much surprised at the information regarding De Lara and Calderon. He has heard sinister reports concerning them; of late so loudly spoken, that he had determined on forbidding them further intercourse with his family. That very day he has been displeased on learning of their ill-timed visit. And now he feels chagrin at something like a reproach conveyed by that expression in Crozier's letter, "The versatile individuals who claim your acquaintance." It hurts his hidalgo pride.

Thrusting the epistle into his pocket, he

questions its bearer ; taking him into his private room, as also into his confidence..

The sailor gives him a detailed account of the attempt at murder, so accidentally frustrated ; afterwards making known other matters relating to himself, and how he has taken service on the Chilian ship—Don Gregorio inquiring particularly about this.

Meanwhile, the young ladies have descended from the azotea, and the ex-man-o'-war's man makes their acquaintance.

They assist in showing him hospitality, loading him with pretty presents, and knick-knacks to be carried on board the *Condor*, to which they know he now belongs.

As he is about to depart, they flutter around him, speaking pleasant words, as if they expected to get something in return—those *billetitas*. For all, he takes departure, without leaving them a scrap !

A pang of disappointment—almost chagrin—shoots through the soul of Carmen, as she

sees him passing out of sight. And similarly afflicted is Iñez ; both reflecting alike.

Still they have hope ; there may be something enclosed for them in that letter they saw him holding up. It seemed large enough to contain two separate notes. And if not these, there should at least be a postscript with special reference to themselves.

Daughters of Eve, they are not long before approaching the subject, and drawing Don Gregorio.

Yes ; there is something said about them in the letter. He communicates it :

" Parting compliments to the señoritas ! "

CHAPTER XIV.

THE LAST LOOK.

“ UP anchor ! ”

The order rings along the deck of the *Crusader*, and the men of the watch stand by the windlass to execute it.

That same morning, Crozier and Cadwallader, turning out of their cots, heard with surprise the order for sending up the “ Blue-Peter,” as also that the ship was to weigh anchor by twelve o’clock noon. Of course, they were expecting it, but not so soon. However, the arrival of the corvette explains all; an officer from the latter vessel having already come on board the *Crusader* with despatches from the flag-ship of the Pacific Squadron.

These contain orders for the frigate to set sail for the Sandwich Islands without delay;

the corvette to replace her on the San Francisco station.

The despatch-bearer has also brought a mail ; and the *Crusader's* people get letters—home-news, welcome to those who have been long away from their native land ; for she has been three years cruising in the South Sea.

Something more than mere news several of her officers receive. In large envelopes, addressed to them, and bearing the British Admiralty seal, are documents of peculiar interest—commissions giving them promotion.

Among the rest, one reaches Edward Crozier, advancing him a step in rank. His ability as an officer has been reported at headquarters ; as also his gallant conduct in having saved a sailor's life—rescued him from drowning—that sailor Harry Blew. In all probability this has obtained him his promotion ; but whatever the cause, he will leave San Francisco a *lieutenant*.

There are few officers, naval or military, who would not feel favoured, and joyous, at such an

event in their lives. And so might Edward Crozier at any other time. But it has not this effect now. On the contrary, as the white canvas is being spread above his head, there is a black shadow upon his brow, while that of Cadwallader is alike clouded.

It is not from any regret either feels at leaving California; but leaving it under circumstances that painfully impress them. The occurrences of the day before, but more those of the night, have revealed a state of things that suggest unpleasant reflections, especially to the new-made lieutenant. He cannot cast out of his mind the sinister impression made upon it by the discovery that Don Francisco de Lara—his rival for the hand of Carmen Montijo—is no other than the notorious “Frank Lara,” the keeper of a Monté table in the saloon El Dorado! Now that he knows it, the knowledge afflicts him, to the laceration of his heart. No wonder at the formality of that letter which he addressed to Don Gregorio, or the insinuation conveyed by it.

Nor strange the cold compliments with which it was concluded ; far stranger had they been warm.

Among other unpleasant thoughts which the young officers have, on being so soon summoned away, is that of leaving matters unsettled with Messrs. De Lara and Calderon. Not that they have any longer either design or desire to stand before such cut-throats in a duel, nor any shame in shunning it. Their last encounter with the scoundrels would absolve them from all stigma, or reproach for refusing to fight them—even were there time and opportunity. So, they need have no fear that their honour will suffer, or that any one will apply to them the opprobrious epithet—*lâche*. Indeed, they have not, and their only regret is at not being able to spend another hour in San Francisco, in order that they might look up the foiled assassins, and give them into the custody of the police. But then that would lead to a difficulty which had better be avoided—the necessity of leaving

their ship, and staying to prosecute an action in courts where the guilty criminal is quite as likely to be favoured as the innocent prosecutor. It is not to be thought of, and long before the frigate's anchor is lifted, they cease thinking of it.

Crozier's last act before leaving port is to write the letter to Don Gregorio; Cadwallader's to carry it ashore, and deliver it to Harry Blew. Then, in less than twenty minutes after the returned midshipman sets foot on the frigate's deck, the order is issued for her sails to be sheeted home, the canvas hanging crumpled from her yards is drawn taut, the anchor hauled apeak, and the huge leviathan, obedient to her helm held in strong hands, is brought round, with head towards the Golden Gate.

The wind catches her spread sails, bellies them out, and in five minutes more, with the British flag floating proudly over her taffrail, she passes out of the harbour; leaving many a vessel behind,

whose captains, for want of crews, bewail their inability to follow her.

But there are eyes following her, from farther off—beautiful eyes, that express sadness of a different kind, and from a different cause. Carmen Montijo and Inez Alvarez stand upon the house-top, glasses in hand. Instead, there should have been kerchiefs—white kerchiefs—waving adieu. And there would have been, but for those chilling words: “*Parting compliments to the señoritas.*” Strange last words for lovers! *Santissima*! what can it mean?

So reflect they to whom they were sent, as they stand in attentive attitude, watching the war-ship, and straining their eyes upon her, till rounding Telegraph Hill she disappears from their sight.

A sad cruel shock both have received—a blow almost breaking their hearts.

Equally unhappy are two young officers on the departing ship. They too stand with glasses in hand levelled upon the house of Don Gregorio Montijo. They can see, as once before, two heads

over the parapet, and, as before, recognize them ; but not as before, or with the same feelings, do they regard them. All is changed now, everything doubtful and indefinite, where it might be supposed everything had been satisfactorily arranged. But it has not—especially in the thoughts of Crozier ; whose dissatisfaction is shown in a soliloquy to which he gives utterance, as Telegraph Hill, interfering with his field of view, causes him to take the telescope from his eye.

“ Carmen Montijo ! ” he exclaims, crushing it to its shortest, and returning the instrument to its case. “ To think of a ‘ sport ’—a common gambler—even having acquaintance with her—far less presuming to make love to her ! ”

“ More than gamblers—both of them,” adds Cadwallader by his side. “ Robbers—murderers—anything if they but had the chance.”

“ Ay, true, Will ; everything vile and vulgar. Don’t it make you mad to think of it ? ”

“ No, not mad. That isn’t the feeling I have ; rather fear.”

“Fear! Of what?”

“That the scoundrels may do some harm to our dear girls. As we know now, they’re up to anything. Since they don’t stick at assassination, they won’t at abduction. I hope your letter to Don Gregorio may open his eyes about them, and put him on his guard. My Ñez! who’s to protect her? I’d give all I have in the world to be sure of her getting safely embarked in that Chilian ship. Once there, dear old Harry Blew will take care of her—of them both.”

Cadwallader’s words seem strangely to affect his companion, changing the expression upon his countenance. It is still shadowed, but the cloud is of a different kind. From anger, it has altered to anxiety!

“You’ve struck a chord, Will, that, while not soothing the old pain, gives me a new one. I wasn’t thinking of that; my thoughts were all occupied with the other trouble—you understand?”

“I do. At the same time, I think you make

too much of the other trouble, as you call it. I confess it troubles me too, a little ; though, perhaps, not as it does you. And luckily less, the more I reflect on it. After all, there don't seem so much to be bothered about. As you know, Ned, it's a common thing among Spanish-Americans, whose customs are altogether unlike our own—to have gamblers going into their best society. Besides, I can tell you something that may comfort you a little—a bit of information I had from Iñez, as we were *platicando* along the road on our ride. It was natural she should speak about the sky-blue fellow, and my sticking his horse in the hip."

"What did she say?" asks Crozier, with newly awakened interest.

"That he was a gentleman by birth ; but falling fast, and indeed quite down."

"And De Lara ; did she say aught of him?"

"She did ; she spoke of him still more disparagingly, though knowing him less. She said he had been introduced to them by the other, and

they were accustomed to meet him on occasions. But of late they had learned more of him ; and learning this, her aunt—your Carmen—had become very desirous of cutting his acquaintance, as indeed all of them. And that they intended doing so—even if they had remained in California. But now— so soon leaving it, they did not like to humiliate De Lara by giving him the *congé* he deserves.”

Crozier, with eyes earnestly fixed upon Cadwalader, has listened to the explanation. At its close he cries out, grasping his comrade’s hand :

“ Will ! you’ve lifted a load from my heart. I now see daylight where all seemed darkness ; and beholding yonder hill feel the truth of Campbell’s splendid lines :

“ A kiss can consecrate the ground,
Where mated hearts are mutual bound ;
The spot, where love’s first links are wound,
That ne’er are riven,
Is hallowed down to Earth’s profound,
And up to Heaven ! ”

After repeating the passionate words, he stands

gazing on a spot so consecrated to him—the summit of the hill—where, just twenty-four hours ago, he spoke love's last appeal to Carmen Montijo. For the *Crusader* has passed out through the Golden Gate, and is now beating down the coast of the Pacific.

Cadwallader's eyes, with equal interest, are turned upon the same spot, and for a time both are silent, absorbed in sweet reflections; recalling all that had occurred in a scene whose slightest incident neither can ever forget.

Only when the land looms low, and the outlines of the San Bruno Mountains begin to blend with the purpling sky, does a shadow again show itself on the countenances of the young officers. But now it is different, no longer expressing chagrin, nor the rancour of jealousy; but doubt, apprehension, fear, for the loved ones left behind. Still the cloud has a silver lining, and that is—Harry Blew.

CHAPTER XV.

A SOLEMN COMPACT.

A COTTAGE of the old Californian kind—in other words, a *ranch*o; one of the humblest of these humble dwellings—the homes of the Spanish-American poor. It is a mere hut, thatched with a species of sea-shore grass, the “ broombent ” seen growing in the sand-dunes near by. For it is by the sea, or within sight of it; inconspicuously placed by reason of rugged rocks, that cluster around, and soar up behind, forming a background in keeping with the rude architectural style of the dwelling. From the land-side it is only approachable by devious and difficult paths, known but to a few familiar friends of its owner.

From the shore, equally difficult, for the little cove leading up to it would not have depth sufficient to permit the passage of a boat, but for a

tiny stream trickling seaward, which has furrowed out a channel in the sand. That by this boats can enter the cove, is evident from one being seen moored near its inner end, in front of, and not far from, the hovel. As it is a craft of the kind generally used by Californian fishermen—more especially those who chase the fur-seal—it may be deduced, that the owner of the hut is a seal-hunter.

This is his profession reputedly; though there are some who ascribe to him callings of a different kind; among others, insinuating that he occasionally does business as a *contrabandista*.

Whether true or not, Rafael Rocas—for he is the owner of the hut—is not the man to trouble himself about denying it. He would scarce consider smuggling an aspersion on his character; and indeed, under old Mexican administration, it would have been but slight blame, or shame, to him. And not such a great deal either under the new, at the time of which we write, but perhaps still less. Compared with other crimes then rife

in California, contrabandism might almost be reckoned an honest calling.

But Rafael Rocas has a repute for doings of a yet darker kind. With those slightly acquainted with him it is only suspicion; but a few of his more intimate associates can say for certain, that he is not disinclined to a stroke of road robbery or a job at house-breaking; so that, if times have changed for the worse, he has not needed any change to keep pace with them.

It is the day on which the British frigate sailed from San Francisco Bay, and he is in his hut; not alone, but in the company of three men, in personal appearance altogether unlike himself. While he wears the common garb of a Californian fisherman—loose pea-coat of coarse canvas, rough water-boots, and seal-skin cap—they are attired in costly stuffs—cloaks of finest broadcloth, *jaquetas* of rich velvet, and *calzoneras*, lashed with gold-lace, and gleaming with constellations of buttons.

Notwithstanding their showy magnificence, the seal-hunter, smuggler, or whatever he may be,

does not appear to treat his guests with any obsequious deference. On the contrary, he is engaged with them in familiar converse, and by his tone and gestures, showing that he feels himself their equal.

Two of the individuals thus oddly consorting are already well known to the reader—the third but slightly. The former are Francisco de Lara and Faustino Calderon ; the latter is Don Manuel Diaz, famed for his fighting-cocks. The first two have just entered under Rocas' roof, finding the cockfighter already there, as De Lara predicted.

After welcoming his newly arrived guests in Spanish-American fashion, placing his house at their disposal—" *Mia casa a la disposicion de Vms* "—the seal-hunter has set before them a bottle of his best liquor—this being *aguardiente* of Tequila. They have taken off their outer apparel—cloaks and hats—and are seated around a small deal table, the only one the shanty contains—its furniture being of the scantiest, and most primitive, kind.

Some conversation of a desultory nature has passed between them ; but they have now entered on a subject more interesting and particular, the key-note having been struck by De Lara. He opens by asking a question :

“ Caballeros ! do you want to be rich ? ”

All three laugh, while simultaneously answering :

“ *Carramba !* Yes.”

Diaz adds :

“ I’ve heard many an idle interrogatory ; but never, in all my life, one so superfluous as yours ; not even when there’s twenty to one offered against a staggering cock.”

Rocas inquires :

“ What do ye call rich, Don Francisco ? ”

“ Well,” responds the Creole, “ say sixty thousand dollars. I suppose you’d consider that sufficient to bestow the title ? ”

“ Certainly,” rejoins Rocas ; “ not only the title, but the substantial and real thing. If I’d only the half of it, I’d give up chasing seals.”

“And I cock-fighting,” put in Diaz; “that is so far as to look to it for a living; though I might still incline to have a main for pastime’s sake. With sixty thousand dollars at my back, I’d go for being a grand ganadero, like friend Faustino here, whose horses and horned cattle yield him such a handsome income.”

The other three laugh at this, since it is known to all of them that the ganadero has long since got rid both of his horses and horned cattle.

“Well, gentlemen,” says De Lara, after this bit of preliminary skirmishing, “I can promise each of you the sum I speak of, if you’re willing to go in with me in a little affair I’ve fixed upon. Are you the men for it?”

“Your second question is more sensible than the first, though equally uncalled for—at least so far as concerns me. I’m the man to go in for anything, which promises to make me the owner of sixty thousand dollars.”

It is Diaz who thus unconditionally declares himself. Calderon endorses it by a declaration of

like daring nature. The seal-hunter simply nods assent, but in a knowing manner. For he is already acquainted with De Lara's design ; knows all about it ; being, in fact, its real originator.

“ Now, Don Francisco ! let's know what you're driving at ? ” demands Diaz, adding : “ Have you struck a *veta*, or discovered a rich *placer* ? If so, we're ready for either rock-mining or pan-washing, so long as the labour's not too hard. Speak out, and tell us what it is. The thought of clutching such a pretty prize makes a man impatient.”

“ Well, I'll let you into the secret so far—it is a *veta*—a grand gold mine—a very *bonanza*—but one which will need neither rock-crushing, nor mud-cradling. The gold has been already gathered ; and lies in a certain place, all in a lump ; only waiting transport to some other place, which we can select at our leisure.”

“ Your words sound well,” remarks Don Manuel.

“Wonderful well,” echoes Rocas, with assumed surprise.

“Are they not too good to be true?” asks Diaz.

“No. They’re true as good. Not a bit of exaggeration, I assure you. The gold only wants to be got at, and then taken.”

“Ah! there may be difficulty about that?” rejoins the doubting Diaz.

“Do you expect to finger sixty thousand *pesos*, without taking the trouble to stretch out your hand?”

“Oh, no. I’m not so unreasonable. For that I’d be willing to stretch out both hands, with a knife in one, and a pistol in the other.”

“Well, it’s not likely to need either, if skilfully managed. I ask you again, are you the men to go in for it?”

“I’m one,” answers Diaz.

“And I another,” growls Rocas.

“I’m not going to say nay,” assents Calderon, glancing significantly at the questioner.

“Enough!” exclaims De Lara; “so far you

all consent to the partnership. But before entering fully into it, it will be necessary to have a more thorough understanding, as also a more formal one. Are you willing to be bound, that there shall be truth between us ? ”

“ We are ! ” is the simultaneous response of all three.

“ And fidelity to the death ? ”

“ To the death ? ”

“ *Bueno !* But we must take an oath to that effect. After which, you shall know what it’s for. Enough now to say it’s a thing that needs swearing upon. If there’s to be treason, there shall be perjury also. Are you ready to take the oath ? ”

They signify assent unanimously.

“ To your feet, then ! ” commands the chief conspirator. “ It will be more seemly to take it standing.”

All four spring up from their chairs, and stand facing the table.

De Lara draws a dagger and lays it down

before him. The others have their stilettoes too—a weapon carried by most Spanish Californians.

Each exhibits his own, laying it beside that already on the table.

With the four De Lara forms a cross—Maltese fashion—and then standing erect, Diaz opposite, Rocas and Calderon on either flank—he repeats in firm, solemn voice, the others after him :

“ In the deed we this day agree to do, acting together and jointly, we swear to be true to each other—to stand by one another, if need be, to the death ; to keep what we do a secret from all the world ; and if any one betray it, the other three swear to follow him wherever he may flee, seek him wherever he may shelter himself, and take vengeance upon him, by taking his life. If any of us fail in this oath, may we be accursed ever after. Amen ! ”

CHAPTER XVI.

THE “BONANZA.”

THE infamous ceremony duly ratified, a drink of the fiery spirit of the *mezcal* plant—a fit finale—is quaffed. Then they take up their stilettoes, replace them in their sheaths, and again sitting down, listen to De Lara, to learn from him the nature of that deed, for doing which they have so solemnly compacted.

In a short time he makes it known, the disclosure calling for but a few words. It is after all but a common affair, though one that needs skill and courage. Simply a “bit of burglary,” but a big thing of its kind. He tells them of three hundred thousand dollars’ worth of gold-dust lying in a lone country-house, with no other protection than that of its owner, with some half-dozen Indian domestics.

There are but two of them to whom this is news—Diaz and Calderon. Rocas smiles while the revelation is being made ; for he has been the original discoverer of the so-called “bonanza.” It was that he communicated to De Lara, when, on the day before, he stopped him and Calderon at the *tinacal* of Dolores.

It is not the first time for the seal-hunter to do business of a similar kind in conjunction with the gambler ; who, like himself, has been accustomed to vary his professional pursuits. But as now, he has always acted under De Lara—whose clear, cool head, and daring hand, assure him leadership in any scheme requiring superior courage with intelligence for its execution.

“How soon ?” asks Diaz, after all has been declared. “I should say the sooner the better.”

“You’re right about that, Don Manuel,” rejoins Rocas.

“True,” assents De Lara. “At the same time, caution must not be lost sight of. There’s two of you aware of what danger we’d be in, if

just now we went near the town, or anywhere outside this snug little asylum of Señor Rocas—whose hospitality we may have to trench upon for some time. I don't know, Don Rafael, whether friend Diaz has told you of what happened last night?"

"He's given me a hint of it," replies the smuggler.

"Oh yes," puts in Diaz; "I thought he might as well know."

"Of course," agrees De Lara. "In that case, then, I've only to add, that there will be no safety for us in San Francisco, so long as the English man-o'-war stays in port. He who broke our bank is rich enough to buy law, and can set its hounds after us by night, or by day. Until he, and his ship, are gone——"

"The ship is gone," says Rocas, interrupting.

"Ha! what makes you say that?"

"Because I know it."

"How?"

"Simply by having seen her. Nothing like

the eyes to give one assurance about anything—with a bit of glass to assist them. Through that thing up there”—he points to an old telescope resting on hooks against the wall—“I saw the English frigate beating out by the Farralones, when I was up on the cliff about an hour ago. I knew her from having seen her lying in the bay. She’s gone to sea, for sure.”

At this the others look surprised, as well as pleased; more especially Calderon. He need no longer fear encountering the much-dreaded midshipman, either in a duel, or with his dirk.

“It’s very strange,” says De Lara. “I’d heard she was to sail soon, but not till another ship came to relieve her.”

“That ship has come,” returns Rocas—“a corvette. I saw her working up the coast last evening, just before sunset. She was making for the Gate, and must be inside now.”

“If all this be true,” says the chief conspirator, “we need lose no more time, but put on our masks,

and bring the affair off at once. It's too late for doing anything to-night; but there's no reason why we shouldn't act to-morrow night, if it prove a dark one. We, four of us, will be strength enough for such a trifling affair. I thought of bringing Juan Lopez, our croupier; but I saw he wouldn't be needed. Besides, from the way he's been behaving lately, I've lost confidence in him. Another reason for leaving him out will be understood by all of you. In a matter of this kind, it *isn't* the more the merrier, though it *is* the fewer the better cheer. The yellow dust will go farther among four than five."

"It will," exclaims the cock-fighter with emphasis, showing his satisfaction at what De Lara has done. He adds: "To-morrow night, then, we are to act?"

"Yes, if it be a dark one. If not, 'twill be wiser to let things lie over for the next. A day can't make much difference; while the colour of the night may. A moonlit sky, or a clear starry one, might get us all where we'd see stars without

any being visible—through a noose round our necks.”

“There’ll be no moon to-morrow night,” puts in the smuggler, who, in this branch of his varied vocations, has been accustomed to take account of such things. “At least,” he adds, “none that will do us any harm. The fog’s sure to be on before midnight; at this time of year, it always is. To-morrow night will be like the last—black as a pot of pitch.”

“True,” says De Lara, as a man with some experience of the sea, also having meteorological knowledge. “No doubt, ’twill be as you say, Rocas. In that case, we’ll have nothing to fear. We can get the job done, and be back here before morning. Ah, then seated round this table, we’ll not be like we are now—poor as rats; but every one with his pile before him—sixty thousand *pesos*.”

“*Carramba!*” exclaims Diaz, in a mocking tone, “while saying vespers to-night, let’s put in a special prayer for to-morrow night to be what Rocas says it will—black as a pot of pitch.”

The profane suggestion is hailed with a burst of ribald laughter; after which they set about preparing the *mascaras*, and other disguises, to be used in their nefarious enterprise.

CHAPTER XVII.

“AMBRE LA PUERTA!”

ANOTHER sun has shone upon San Francisco Bay, and again gone down in red gleam over the far-spreading Pacific, leaving the sky of a leaden colour, moonless and starless.

As the hour of midnight approaches it assumes the hue predicted by Rocas, and desired by Diaz. For the ocean fog has again rolled shoreward across the peninsula, and shrouds San Francisco as with a pall. The adjacent country is covered with its funereal curtain, embracing within its folds the house of Don Gregorio Montijo.

The inmates seem all asleep, as at this hour they should. No light is seen through the windows, nor any sound heard within the walls. Not even the baying of a watch-dog, the bellow of

a stalled ox, or the stamping of a horse in the stables. Inside, as without, all is silence.

The profound silence seems strange, though favourable, to four men not far from the place, and gradually, but with slow steps, drawing nearer to it. For they are approaching by stealth, as can be told by their attitudes and gestures. They advance crouchingly, now and then stopping to take a survey of the *terrain* in front, as they do so, exchanging whispered words with one another.

Through the hazy atmosphere their figures show weird-like—all the more from their grotesque gesticulations. Even if scrutinized closely, and in clearest light, they would present this appearance; for although in human shape, and wearing the garb of men, their faces more resemble those of demons.

They are human countenances, nevertheless, but *enmascaradas*.

Nothing more is needed to tell who, and what they are, with their purpose in thus approaching

Don Gregorio's house. They are burglars, designing to break it.

It needs not the removal of their masks to identify them as the four conspirators left plotting in the rancho of Rafael Rocas.

They are now *en route* for putting their scheme into execution.

It would look as if Don Gregorio were never to get his gold to Panama—much less have it transported to Spain.

And his daughter! What of her, with Francisco de Lara drawing nigh as one of the nocturnal ravagers? His granddaughter, too, Faustino Calderon being another?

One cognizant of the existing relations, and spectator of what is passing now—seeing the craped robbers as they steal on towards the house—would suppose it in danger of being doubly despoiled, and that its owner is to suffer desolation, not only in fortune, but in that far dearer to him—his family.

The burglars are approaching from the front,

up the avenue, though not on it. They keep along its edge among the manzanita bushes. These, with the fog, afford sufficient screen to prevent their being observed from the house—even though sentinels were set upon its azotea. But there appears to be none; no eye to see, no voice to give warning, not even the bark of a watch-dog to wake those unconsciously slumbering within.

As already said, there is something strange in this. On a large grazing estate it is rare for the Molossian to be silent. More usually his sonorous voice is heard throughout the night, or at brief intervals.

Though anything but desirous to hear the barking of dogs, the buglars are themselves puzzled at the universal silence, so long continued. For before entering the enclosure, they have been lying concealed in a thicket outside, their horses tied to trees, where they have now left them, and during all the time not a sound had reached their ears; no voice either of man or animal!

They are now within sight of the house, its massive front looming large and dark through the mist—still no stir outside, and within the stillness of death itself!

Along with astonishment, a sense of awe is felt by one of the four criminals—Calderon, who has still some lingering reluctance as to the deed about to be done—or it may be but fear. The other three are too strong in courage, and too hardened in crime, for scruples of any kind.

Arriving at the end of the avenue, and within a short distance of the dwelling, they stop for a final consultation, still under cover of the manzanitas.

All silent as ever; no one stirring; no light from any window; the shutters closed behind the *rejas*—the great *puerta* as well!

“Now, about getting inside,” says De Lara; “what will be our best way?”

“In my opinion,” answers Diaz, “we’ll do best by climbing up to the *azotea*, and over it into the *patio*.”

“Where’s your ladder?” asks Rocas in his gruff blunt way.

“We must find one, or something that’ll serve instead. There should be loose timber lying about the *corrals*—enough to provide us with a climbing-pole.”

“And while searching for it, wake up some of the *vaqueros*. That won’t do.”

“Then what do you propose, Rafael?” interrogates the chief conspirator.

The seal-hunter, from a presumed acquaintance with housebreaking, is listened to with attention.

“Walk straight up to the door,” he answers; “knock, and ask to be admitted.”

“Ay; and have a blunderbuss fired at us, with a shower of bullets big as billiard-balls. *Carrai!*”

It is Calderon who speaks thus apprehensively.

“Not the least danger of that,” rejoins Rocas.

“Take my word, we’ll be let in.”

“Why do you think so?”

“ Why? Because we have a claim on the hospitality of the house.”

“ I don’t understand you, Rocas,” says De Lara.

“ Haven’t we a good story to tell—simple, and to the purpose?”

“ Still, I don’t understand. Explain yourself, Rafael.”

“ Don’t we come as messengers from the man-of-war—from those officers, you’ve been telling me about?”

“ Ah! now I perceive your drift.”

“ One can so announce himself, while the others keep out of sight. He can say he’s been sent by the young gentlemen on an errand to Don Gregorio, or the señoritas, if you like. Something of importance affecting their departure. True, by this they’ll know the ship’s weighed anchor. No matter; the story of a message will stand good all the same.”

“ Rafael Rocas!” exclaims De Lara, “you’re a born genius. Instead of being forced to do a

little smuggling now and then, you ought to be made *administrator-general of customs*. We shall act as you advise. No doubt the door will be opened. When it is, one can take charge of the janitor. He's a sexagenarian, and won't be hard to hold. If he struggle, let him be silenced. The rest of us can go ransacking. You, Calderon, are acquainted with the interior, and, as you say, know the room where Don Gregorio is most likely to keep his chest. You must lead us straight for that.”

“But, Francisco,” whispers Calderon in the ear of his confederate, after drawing him a little apart from the other two; “about the *niñas*? You don't intend anything with them?”

“Certainly not—not to-night; nor in this fashion. I hope being able to approach *them* in gentler guise, and more becoming time. When they're without a *peso* in the world, they'll be less proud; and may be contented to stay a little longer in California. To-night we've enough on our hands without thinking of women. One

thing at a time—their money first—their selves afterwards.”

“ But suppose they should recognize us ? ”

“ They can’t. Disguised as we are, I defy a man’s mother to know him. If they did, then—— ”

“ Then what ? ”

“ No use reflecting what. Don’t be so scared, man ! If I’d anticipated any chance of its coming to extremes of the kind you’re pondering upon, I wouldn’t be here prepared for only half-measures. Perhaps we shan’t even wake the ladies up ; and if we do, there’s not the slightest danger of our being known. So make your mind easy, and let’s get through with it. See ! Diaz and Rocas are getting impatient ! We must rejoin them, and proceed to business at once.”

The four housebreakers again set their heads together ; and after a few whispered words, to settle all particulars about their plan of proceeding, advance towards the door.

Once up to it, they stand close in, concealed by its o'er-shadowing arch.

With the butt of his pistol, De Lara knocks.

Diaz, unknown to the family, and therefore without fear of his voice being recognized, is to do the talking.

No one answers the knock ; and it is repeated. Louder, and still louder.

The sexagenarian janitor sleeps soundly to-night, thinks De Lara, deeming it strange.

Another “rat-at-ta” with the pistol-butt, followed by the usual formulary :

“*Ambre la puerta !*”

At length comes a response from within ; but not the customary “*Quen es ?*” nor anything in Spanish. On the contrary, the speech which salutes the ears of those seeking admission is in a different tongue, and tone altogether unlike that of a native Californian.

“Who the old scratch are ye ?” asks a voice from inside, while a heavy footstep is heard coming along the *saguan*. Before the startled

burglars can shape a reply, the voice continues :

“ D——n ye ! What d’ye want anyhow—wakin’ a fellur out o’ his sleep at this time o’ the night ? ’Twould sarve ye right if I sent a bullet through the door at ye. Take care what you’re about. I’ve got my shootin’-iron handy ; a Colt’s revolver—biggest size at thet.”

“ *Por Dios !* what does this mean ? ” mutters De Lara.

“ Tell him, Diaz,” he adds, in *sotto-voce* to the cock-fighter—“ tell him we’re from the British man-of-war with—— *Carrai !* I forgot, you don’t speak English. I must do it myself. *He* won’t know who it is.” Then raising his voice : “ We want to see Don Gregorio Montijo. We bring a message from the British man-o’-war—from the two officers.”

“ Consarn the British man-o’-war ! ” interrupts the surly speaker inside ; “ an’ yur message, an’ yur two officers, I know nothin’ ’bout them. As for Don Gregorio, if ye want to get sight on

him, ye're a preeshus way wide o' the mark. He ain't here any more. He's gin up the house, an' tuk everything o' hisn out o't this mornin'. I'm only hyar in charge o' the place. Guess you'll find both the Don an' his darters at the *Parker*—the most likeliest place to tree thet lot.”

Don Gregorio gone!—his gold—his girls! Only an empty house, in charge of a care-taker, who carries a Colt's repeating pistol, biggest size, and would use it on the smallest provocation!

No good their going inside now, but a deal of danger. Anything but pleasant medicine would be a pill from that six-shooter.

“*Carramba! Carajo! Chingara! Maldita!*”

Such are the wild exclamations that issue from the lips of the disappointed housebreakers, as they turn away from the dismantled dwelling, and hasten to regain their horses.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A SCRATCH CREW.

It was a fortunate inspiration that led the haciendado to have his gold secretly carried on board the Chilian ship; another, that influenced him to transfer his family, and household gods, to an hotel in the town.

It was all done in a day—that same day. Every hour, after the sailing of the *Crusader*, had he become more anxious; for every hour brought intelligence of some new act of outlawry in the neighbourhood, impressing him with the insecurity, not only of his Penates, but the lives of himself and his ladies. So long as the British ship lay in port, it seemed a protection to him; and although this may have been but fancy, it served somewhat to tranquillize his fears. Soon

as she was gone, he gave way to them, summoned Silvestre, with a numerous retinue of *cargadores*, and swept the house clean of everything he intended taking—the furniture alone being left, as part of the purchased effects.

He has indeed reason to congratulate himself on his rapid removal, as he finds on the following day, when visiting his old home for some trifling purpose, and there hearing what had happened during the night.

The man in charge — a stalwart American, armed to the teeth—gives him a full account of the nocturnal visitors. There were four, he says—having counted them through the keyhole—inquiring for him, Don Gregorio. They appeared greatly disappointed at not getting an interview with him; and went off uttering adjurations in Spanish, though having held their parley in English.

A message from the British man-of-war! And brought by men who swore in Spanish! Strange all that, thinks Don Gregorio, knowing the *Cru-*

sader should then be at least a hundred leagues off at sea.

Besides, the messengers have not presented themselves at the *Parker House*, to which the care-taker had directed them.

“What can it mean?” asks the ex-haciendado of himself.

Perhaps the sailor who is now first-officer of the Chilian ship may know something of it; and he will question him next time he goes aboard.

He has, however, little hope of being enlightened in that quarter; his suspicions turning elsewhere. He cannot help connecting Messrs. De Lara and Calderon with the occurrence. Crozier's letter, coupled with the further information received from the bearer of it, has thrown such a light on the character of these two *caballeros*, he can believe them capable of anything. After their attempt to rob the young officers, and murder them as well, they would not hesitate to serve others the same; and the demand for admission to his house may have

been made by these very men, with a couple of confederates—their design to plunder it, if not do something worse.

Thus reflecting, he is thankful for having so unconsciously foiled them—indeed, deeming it a Providence.

Still is he all the more solicitous to leave a land beset with such dangers. Even in the town he does not feel safe. Robbers and murderers walk boldly abroad through the streets; not alone, but in the company of judges who have tried without condemning them; while lesser criminals stand by drinking-bars, hobnobbing with the constables who either hold them in charge, or have just released them, after a mock-hearing before some magistrate, with eyes blind as those of Justice herself—blinded by the gold-dust of California!

Notwithstanding all this, Don Gregorio need have no fear for his ladies. Their sojourn at the hotel may be somewhat irksome, and uncongenial; still are they safe. Rough-looking, and

boisterous, as are some of their fellow-guests, they are yet in no way rude. The most refined, or sensitive, lady need not fear moving in their midst. A word, or gesture, of insult to her would call forth instant chastisement.

It is not on their account he continues anxious, but because of his unprotected treasure. Though secreted aboard the *Condor*, it is still unsafe. Should its whereabouts get whispered abroad, there are robbers bold enough, not only to take it from the Chilian skipper, but set fire to his ship, himself in her, and cover their crime by burning everything up.

Aware of all this, the ex-haciendado, with the help of friendly Silvestre, has half-a-dozen trusty men placed aboard of her—there to stay till a crew can be engaged. It is a costly matter, but money may save money, and now is not the time to cavil at expenses.

As yet, not a sailor has presented himself. None seem caring to ship “for Valparaiso and intermediate ports,” even at the double wages

offered in the *Diario*. The *Condor's* forecastle remains untenanted, except by the six long-shore men, who temporarily occupy it, without exactly knowing why they are there; but contented to make no inquiry, so long as they are receiving their ten dollars a day. Of crew, there is only the captain himself, his first-officer, and the cook. The oranges do not count.

Day by day, Don Gregorio grows more impatient, and is in constant communication with Silvestre.

"Offer higher wages," he says. "Engage sailors at any price."

The shipping-agent yields assent; inserts a second *aviso* in the Spanish paper, addressed to *marineros* of all nations. Triple wages to those who will take service on a well-appointed ship. In addition, all the usual allowances, the best of grub and grog. Surely this should get the *Condor* a crew.

And at length it does. Within twenty-four hours after the advertisement has appeared, sailors

begin to show on her decks. They come singly, or in twos and threes; and keep coming till as many as half-a-score have presented themselves. They belong to different nationalities, speaking several tongues—among them English, French, and Danish. But the majority appear to be Spaniards, or Spanish-Americans—as might have been expected from the *Condor* being a Chilian ship.

Among them is the usual variety of facial expression; though, in one respect, a wonderful uniformity. Scarce a man of them whose countenance is not in some way unprepossessing—either naturally of sinister cast, or brought to it by a career of sinful dissipation. Several of them show signs of having been recently drinking—with eyes bleary and bloodshot. Of strife, too, its souvenirs visible in other eyes that are blackened, and scars upon cheeks not yet cicatrized. Some are still in a state of inebriety, and stagger as they stray about the decks.

Under any other circumstances, such sailors

would stand no chance of getting shipped. As it is, they are accepted—not one refused. Captain Lantanas has no choice, and knows it. Without them he is helpless, and it would be hopeless for him to think of putting to sea. If he do not take them, the *Condor* may swing idly at her anchor for weeks, it might be months.

Quick as they came aboard, he enters their names on the ship's books, while Harry Blew assigns them their separate bunks in the fore-peak. One, a Spaniard, by name Padilla, shows credentials from some former ship, which procure him the birth of *piloto segundo* (second-mate).

After the ten have been taken, no more present themselves. Even the big bounty offered does not tempt another tar from the saloons of San Francisco. In any other seaport, it would empty every sailors' boarding-house, to its last lodger.

And ten hands are not enough to work the good ship, *Condor*.

Her captain knows it, and waits another

day, hoping he may get a few more to complete her complement; but hopes in vain, the supply seems exhausted.

Becoming convinced of this, he determines to set sail with such crew as he has secured. But little more remains to be done; some stores to be shipped, provisions for the voyage, the best and freshest San Francisco can afford. For he who authorizes their inlay cares not for the cost—only that things may be made comfortable. Don Gregorio gives *carte-blanche* for providing the vessel; and it is done according to his directions.

At length everything is ready, and the *Condor* only awaits her passengers. Her cabin has been handsomely furnished; its best state-room decorated to receive two ladies, fair as ever set foot on board ship.

CHAPTER XIX.

“ A D I O S C A L I F O R N I A ! ”

A BRIGHT sun rises over San Francisco, in all likelihood the last Don Gregorio Montijo will ever witness in California. For just as the orb of day shows its disc above the dome-shaped *silhouette* of Monté Diablo, flinging its golden shimmer across the bay, a boat leaves the town-pier, bearing him, and his, towards the Chilian vessel, whose signals for sailing are out.

Others are in the boat ; a large party of ladies and gentlemen, who accompany them to do a last hand-shaking on board. For, in quitting California, the ex-haciendado leaves many friends behind ; among them, some who will pass sleep-

less hours thinking of Carmen Montijo ; and others whose hearts will be sore as their thoughts turn to Ñez Alvarez.

It may be that none of these are present now ; and better for them if not ; since the most painful of all partings is that, where the lover sees his sweetheart sail away, with the knowledge she cares neither to stay, nor come back.

The young ladies going off show but little sign of regret at leaving. They are hindered by remembrance of the last words spoken at another parting, now painfully recalled : “ *Hasta Cadiz !* ” The thought of that takes the sting out of this.

The boat reaches the ship, and swinging around, lies alongside.

Captain Lantanas stands by the gangway to receive his passengers, with their friends ; while his first-officer helps them up the man-ropes.

Among the ladies, Harry Blew distinguishes the two he is to have charge of, and with

them is specially careful. As their soft-gloved fingers rest in his rough horny hand, he mentally registers a vow, that it shall never fail them in the hour of need—if such there ever be.

On the cabin-table is spread a refection of the best; and around it the leave-takers assemble, the Chilian skipper doing the honours of his ship. And gracefully, for he is a gentleman.

Half-an-hour of merry-making, light chatter, enlivened by the popping of corks, and clinking of glasses; then ten minutes of converse more serious; after which, hurried graspings of the hand, and a general scattering towards the shore-boat; which soon after moves off amid exclamations of “*Adios!*” and “*Bueno viaje!*” accompanied by the waving of hands, and white slender fingers saluting with tremulous motion—like the quiver of a kestrel’s wing—the fashion of the Spanish-American fair.

While the boat is being rowed back to the shore, the *Condor* puts out her canvas, and stands away towards the Golden Gate.

She is soon out of sight of the port; having entered the strait which gives access to the great landlocked estuary. But a wind blowing in from the west, hinders her; and she is all the day tacking through the eight miles of narrow water, which connects San Francisco Bay with the Pacific.

The sun is now set as she passes the old Spanish fort, and opens view of the outside ocean. But the heavenly orb that rose over Monté Diablo like a globe of gold, goes down beyond 'Los Farrallones' more resembling a ball of fire about to be quenched hissing in the sea.

It is still only half-immersed behind the blue expanse, when, gliding out from the portals of the Golden Gate, the *Condor* rounds Seal Rock, and stands on her course W.S.W.

The wind shifts, the evening breeze begins

to blow steadily from the land. This is favourable; and after tacks have been set, and sails sheeted home, there is but little work to be done.

It is the hour of the second dog-watch, and the sailors are all on deck, grouped about the fore hatch, and gleefully conversing. Here and there an odd individual stands by the side, with eyes turned shoreward, taking a last look at the land. Not as if he regretted leaving it, but is rather glad to get away. More than one of that crew have reason to feel thankful that the Chilian craft is carrying them from a country, where, had they stayed much longer, it would have been to find lodgment in a jail. Out at sea, their faces seem no better favoured than when they first stepped aboard. Scarce recovered from their shore carousing, they show swollen cheeks, and eyes inflamed with alcohol; countenances from which the breeze of the Pacific, however pure, cannot remove that sinister cast.

At sight of them, and the two fair creatures sailing in the same ship, a thought about the incongruity—as also the insecurity of such companionship—cannot help coming uppermost. It is like two beautiful Birds of Paradise shut up in the same cage with wolves, tigers, and hyenas.

But the Birds of Paradise are not troubling themselves about this, or anything else in the ship. Lingered abaft the binnacle, with their hands resting on the taffrail, they look back at the land, their eyes fixed upon the summit of a hill, ere long to become lost to their view by the setting of the sun. They have been standing so for some time in silence, when Iñez says :

“ I can tell what you’re thinking of, *tia*.”

“ Indeed, can you ? Well, let me hear it.”

“ You’re saying to yourself : ‘ What a beautiful hill that is yonder ; and how I should like to be once more upon its top—not alone, but with somebody beside me.’ Now, tell the truth, isn’t that it ? ”

“Those are your own thoughts, *sobrina*.”

“I admit it, and, also, that they are pleasant. So are yours; are they not?”

“Only in part. I have others, which I suppose you can share with me.”

“What others?”

“Reflections not at all agreeable, but quite the contrary.”

“Again distressing yourself about that! It don’t give me the slightest concern; and didn’t from the first.”

“No?”

“No!”

“Well; I must say you take things easily—which I don’t. A lover—engaged too—to go away in that *sans façon* way! Not so much as a note, nor even a verbal message. *Santissima!* it was something more than rude—it was cruel; and I can’t help thinking so.”

“But there was a message in the letter to grandpapa, for both of us. What more would you wish?”

“Pff! who cares for parting compliments? A *lepero* would send better to his sweetheart in sleeveless *camisa*. That’s not the message for me.”

“How can you tell there wasn’t some other which has miscarried? I’m almost sure there has been; else why should somebody have knocked at the door, and said so. The *Americano* left in charge of the house has told grandpa something about four men having come there the night after we left it. One may have been this messenger we’ve missed—the others going with him for company. And through his neglect, we’ve not got letters intended for us. Or, if they haven’t written, it’s because they were pressed for time. However, we shall know when we meet them at Cadiz.”

“Ah! when we meet them there, I’ll demand an explanation from Eduardo. That shall I, and get it—or know the reason why.”

“He will give a good one, I warrant. There’s been a miscarriage, somehow. For hasn’t there

been mystery all round? Luckily, no fighting, as we feared, and have reason to rejoice. Neither anything seen, or heard, of your Californian chivalry! That's the strangest thing of all.”

“It is indeed strange,” rejoins Carmen, showing emotion; “I wonder what became of them. Nobody that we know has met either after that day; nor yet heard word of them.”

“Carmen, I believe one *has* heard of them.”

“Who?”

“Your father.”

“What makes you think so, Iñez?”

“Some words I overheard, while he was conversing with the English sailor who's now in the ship with us. I'm almost certain there was something in Mr. Crozier's letter relating to De Lara and Calderon. What it was, grandpa seems desirous of keeping to himself; else he would have told us. We must endeavour to find it out from the sailor.”

“You're a cunning schemer, *sobrina*. I should never have thought of that. We shall try. Now

I remember, Eduardo once saved this man's life. Wasn't it a noble daring deed ? For all, I'm mad angry with him, leaving me as he has done ; and shan't be pacified till he get upon his knees, and apologize for it. That he shall at Cadiz ! ”

“ To confess the truth, *tia* ; I was a little spited myself at first. On reflection, I feel sure there's been some mischance, and we've been wronging them both. I shan't blame my darling till I see him again. Then if he can't clear himself, oh, won't I ? ”

“ You forgive too easily. I can't.”

“ Yes, you can. Look at yonder hill. Recall the pleasant hour passed upon it, and you will be lenient, as I am.”

Carmen obeys, and again turns her glance toward the spot consecrated by sweetest remembrances.

As she continues to gaze at it, the cloud lifts from her brow, replaced by a smile, and promises easy pardon to him who has offended her.

In silence the two stand, straining their eyes

upon the far summit, till shore and sea become one—both blending into the purple of twilight.

“*Adios, California!*”

Land no longer in sight. The ship is *au large* on the ocean.

CHAPTER XX.

A TATTOO THAT NEEDS RETOUCHING.

THE great Pacific current in many respects resembles the Gulf Stream of the Atlantic. Passing eastward under the Aleutian Archipelago, it impinges upon the American continent, by Vancouver's Island; thence setting southward, along the Californian coast, curves round horse-shoe shape, and sets back for the central part of the South Sea, sweeping on past the Sandwich Isles.

By this disposition, a ship bound from San Francisco for Honolulu has the flow in her favour; and if the wind be also favourable, she will make fast way.

As chance has it, both are propitious to the *Crusader*; and the war-ship standing for the Sandwich Islands will likely reach them after an incredibly short voyage.

There are two individuals on board of her who wish it to be so ; counting every day, almost every hour of her course. Not that they have any desire to visit the dominions of King Kamehameha, or expect pleasure there. On the contrary, if left to themselves, the frigate's stay in the harbour of Honolulu would not last longer than necessary to procure a boat-load of bananas, and replenish her hen-coops with fat Kanaka fowls.

It is scarce necessary to say that they, who are thus indifferent to the delights of Owyhee, are the late-made lieutenant, Crozier, and the midshipman, Cadwallader. For them the brown-skinned Hawaian beauties will have little attraction. Not the slightest danger of either yielding to the blandishments so lavishly bestowed upon sailors by these seductive damsels of the Southern Sea. For the hearts of both are yet thrilling with the remembrance of smiles vouchsafed them by other daughters of the sunny south, of a far different race—thrilling, too, with the anticipation

of again basking in their smiles under the sky of Andalusia.

It needs hope—all they can command—to cheer them. Not because the time is great, and the place distant. Sailors are accustomed to long separation from those they love, and, therefore, habituated to patience. It is no particular uneasiness of this kind which shadows their brows, and makes every mile of the voyage seem a league.

Nor are their spirits clouded by any reflections on that, which so chafed them just before leaving San Francisco. If they have any feelings about it, they are rather those of repentance for suspicions, which both believe to have been unfounded, as unworthy.

What troubles them now—for they are troubled—has nought to do with that. Nor is it any doubt as to the loyalty of their *fiancées*; but fear for their safety. It is not well defined; but like some dream which haunts them—at times so slight as to cause little concern, at others, filling them with keen anxiety.

But in whatever degree felt, it always assumes the same shape—two figures conspicuous in it, besides those of their betrothed sweethearts—two faces of evil omen, one that of Calderon, the other De Lara's.

What the young officers saw of these men, and what more they learnt of them before leaving San Francisco, makes natural their misgivings, and justifies their fears. Something seems to whisper them, that there is danger to be dreaded from the gamblers—desperadoes as they have shown themselves—that through them some eventuality may arise, affecting the future of Carmen Montijo and Inez Alvarez—even to prevent their escaping from California.

Escape! Yes; that is the word Messrs. Crozier and Cadwallader make use of in their conversation on the subject—the form in which their fear presents itself.

Before reaching the Sandwich Islands, they receive a scrap of intelligence, which in some respect cheers them. It has become known to the

Crusader's crew that the frigate is to make but short stay there—will not even enter the harbour of Honolulu. The commission entrusted to her captain is of no very important nature. He is simply to leave an official despatch, with some commands for the British consul; after which head round again, and straight for Panama.

“Good news; isn't it, Ned?” says Cadwalader to his senior, as the two on watch together stand conversing. “With the quick time we've made from Frisco, as the Yankees call it, and no delay to speak of in the Sandwiches, we ought to get to the Isthmus nearly as soon as the Chilian ship.”

“True; but it will a good deal depend on the time the Chilian ship leaves San Francisco. No doubt she'd have great difficulty in getting a sufficient number of hands. Blew told you, there was but the captain and himself!”

“Only they; and the cook, an old darkey—a runaway slave, he said. Besides a brace of great red baboons—orangs. That was the whole of her

crew, by last report ! Well ; in one way we ought to be glad she's so short," continues the midshipman. "It may give us the chance of reaching Panama soon as she, if not before her ; and, as the frigate's destined to put into that port, we may meet the dear girls again, sooner than we expected."

"I hope, and trust, we shall. I'd give a thousand pounds to be sure of it. It would lift a load off my mind—the heaviest I've ever had on it."

"Off mine, too. But even if we don't reach Panama soon as the Chilian craft, we'll hear whether she's passed through there. If she have, that'll set things right enough. We'll then know they're safe, and will be so—*Hasta Cadiz*."

"It seems a good omen," says Crozier, reflectingly, "that we are not to be delayed at the Islands."

"It does," rejoins Cadwallader ; "though, but for the other thing, I'd liked it better if we had to stay there—only for a day or two."

“For what reason?”

“There!” says the midshipman, pulling up his shirt-sleeve, and laying bare his arm to the elbow. “Look at that, lieutenant!”

The lieutenant looks, and sees upon the skin, white as alabaster, a bit of tattooing. It is the figure of a young girl, somewhat scantily robed, with long streaming tresses: hair, contour, countenance, everything done in the deepest indigo.

“Some old sweetheart?” suggests Crozier.

“It is.”

“But *she* can’t be a Sandwich Island belle. You’ve never been there?”

“No, she isn’t. She’s a little Chileña, whose acquaintance I made last spring, while we lay at Valparaiso. Grummet, the cutter’s coxswain, did the tattoo for me, as we came up the Pacific. He hadn’t quite time to finish it, as you see. There was to be a picture of the Chilian flag over her head, and underneath the girl’s name, or initials. I’m now glad they didn’t go in.”

“But what the deuce has all this to do with the Sandwich Islands?”

“Only, that, there, I intended to have the thing taken out again. Grummet tells me he can’t do it, but that the Kanakas can. He says they’ve got some trick for extracting the stain, without scarring the skin, or only very slightly.”

“But why should you care about removing it? I acknowledge tattooing is not nice, on the epidermis of a gentleman; and I’ve met scores, like yourself, sorry for having submitted to it. After all, what does it signify? Nobody need ever see it, unless you wish them to.”

“There’s where you mistake. Somebody *might* see it, without my wishing—sure to see it, if ever I get——”

“What?”

“Spliced.”

“Ah! Iñez?”

“Yes; Iñez. Now you understand why I’d like to spend a day or two among the South Sea Islanders. If I can’t get the thing rubbed out,

I'll be in a pretty mess about it. I know Iñez would be indulgent in a good many ways; but when she sees that blue image on my arm, she'll look black enough. And what am I to say to her? I told her, she was the first sweetheart I ever had; as you know, Ned, a little bit of a fib. Only a white one; for the Chileña was but a mere fancy, gone out of my mind long ago; as, no doubt, I am out of hers. The question is, how's her picture to be got out of my skin? I'd give something to know."

"If that's all your trouble, you needn't be at any expense—except what you may tip old Grummet. You say he has not completed the portrait of your Chileña. That's plain enough, looking at the shortness of her skirts. Now let him go on, and lengthen them a little. Then finish by putting a Spanish flag over her head, instead of the Chilian, as you intended, and underneath the initials "I. A." With that on your arm, you may safely show it to Iñez."

"A splendid idea! The very thing! The

only difficulty is, that this picture of the Chilian girl isn't anything like as good-looking as Iñez. Besides, it would never pass for her portrait.

"Let me see. I'm not so sure about that. I think, with a few more touches it will stand well enough for your Andalusian. Grummet's given her all the wealth of hair you're so constantly bragging about. The only poverty's in that petticoat. But if you get the skirt stretched a bit, that will remedy it. You want sleeves, too, to make her a lady. Then set a tall tortoise-shell comb upon her crown, with a spread of lace over it, hanging down below the shoulders—the mantilla—and you'll make almost as good an Andalusian of her as is Iñez herself."

"By Jove! you're right; it can be done. The bit added to the skirt will look like a flounced border. The Spanish ladies have such on their dresses. I've seen them. And a fan—they have that too. She must have one."

"By all means, give her a fan. And as you're doubtful about the likeness, let it be done so as

to cover her face—at least the lower half of it; that will be just as they carry it. You can hide that nose, which is a trifle too snub for your *fiancée*. The eyes appear good enough.”

“The Chileña had splendid eyes!”

“Of course, or she wouldn’t have her portrait on your arm. But how did the artist know that? Has he ever seen the original?”

“No; I described her to him; and he’s well acquainted with the costume the Chilian girls wear. He’s seen plenty of such. I told him to make the face a nice oval, with a small mouth, and pretty pouting lips; then to give her great big eyes. You see he’s done all that.”

“He has, certainly.”

“About the feet? They’ll do, won’t they? They’re small enough, I should say.”

“Quite small enough; and those ankles are perfection. They ought to satisfy your Andalusian—almost flatter her.”

“Flatter her! I should think not. They might your Biscayan, with her big feet; but not

Iñez; who's got the tiniest little understandings I ever saw under the skirt of a petticoat—tall as she is.”

“Stuff!” scornfully retorts Crozier; “that’s a grand mistake people make about small feet. It’s not the size, but the shape, that’s to be admired. They should be in proportion to the rest of the body; otherwise they’re a monstrosity—as among the Chinese, for instance. And as for small feet in men, about which the French pride, and pinch, themselves, why every tailor’s got that.”

“Ha, ha, ha!” laughs the young Welshman. “A treatise on Orthopœdia, or whatever it’s called. Well, I shall let the Chileña’s feet stand, with the ankles too, and get Grummet to add on the toggery.”

“What if your *Chileña* should chance to set eyes on the improved portrait? Remember we’re to call at Valparaiso!”

“By Jove! I never thought of that.”

“If you should meet her, you’ll do well to keep

your shirt-sleeves down, or you may get the picture scratched—your cheeks along with it.”

“Bah ! there’s no danger of that. I don’t expect ever to see that girl again—don’t intend to. It wouldn’t be fair, after giving that engagement ring to Iñez. If we do put into Valparaiso, I’ll stay aboard all the time the frigate’s in port. That will insure against any——”

“*Land, ho !*”

Their dialogue is interrupted. The look-out, on the masthead, has sighted Mauna-Loa.

CHAPTER XXI.

A CREW THAT MEANS MUTINY.

A SHIP sailing down the Pacific, on the line of longitude 125° W. Technically speaking, not a *ship*, but a *barque*, as may be told by her mizzen-sails, set fore and aft.

Of all craft encountered on the ocean, there is none so symmetrically beautiful as the *barque*. Just as the name looks well on the page of poetry and romance, so is the reality itself on the surface of the sea. The sight is simply perfection.

And about the vessel in question another graceful peculiarity is observable : her masts are of the special kind called *polacca*—in one piece from step to truck.

Such vessels are common enough in the Mediterranean, and not rare in Spanish-American ports. They may be seen at Monte Video,

Buenos Ayres, and Valparaiso—to which last this barque belongs. For she is Chilian built; her tall tapering masts made of trees from the ancient forests of Araucania. Painted upon the stern is the name, *El Condor*; and she is the craft commanded by Captain Antonio Lantanas.

This may seem strange. In the harbour of San Francisco the *Condor* was a ship. How can she now be a barque?

The answer is easy, as has been the transformation; and a word will explain it. For the working of her sails, a barque requires fewer hands than a ship. Finding himself with a short crew, Captain Lantanas has resorted to a stratagem, common in such cases, and converted his vessel accordingly. The conversion was effected on the day before leaving San Francisco; so that the *Condor*, entering the Golden Gate a ship, stood out of it a barque. As such she is now on the ocean, sailing southward along the line of longitude 125° W.

In the usual track taken by sailing-vessels

between Upper California and the Isthmus, she has westered, to get well clear of the coast, and catch the regular winds, that, centuries ago, wafted the spice-laden Spanish galleons from the Philippines to Acapulco. A steamer would hug the shore, keeping the brown barren mountains of Lower California in view. Instead, the *Condor* has sheered wide from the land; and, in all probability, will not again sight it till she's bearing up to Panama Bay.

It is the middle watch of the night—the first after leaving San Francisco. Eight bells have sounded, and the chief mate is in charge, the second having turned in, along with the division of crew allotted to him. The sea is tranquil, the breeze light, blowing from the desired quarter, so that there is nothing to call for any unusual vigilance.

True, the night is dark, but without portent of storm. It is, as Harry Blew knows, only a thick rain-cloud, such as often shadows this part of the Pacific.

But the darkness need not be dreaded. They are in too low a latitude to encounter icebergs; and upon the wide waters of the South Sea there is not much danger of collision with ships.

Notwithstanding these reasons for feeling secure, the chief officer of the *Condor* paces her decks with a brow clouded, as the heavens over his head; while the glance of his eye betrays anxiety of no ordinary kind. It cannot be from any apprehension about the weather. He does not regard the sky, nor the sea, nor the sails. On the contrary, he moves about, not with bold manlike step, as one having command of a vessel, but stealthily, now and then stopping and standing in crouched attitude, within the deeper shadow thrown upon the decks by masts, bulwarks, and boats. He seems less to occupy himself about the ropes, spars, and sails, than the behaviour of those who work them. Not while they are working them either, but more when they are straying idly along the gangways, or clustered in some corner, and con-

versing. In short, he appears to be playing spy on them.

For this he has his reasons. And for all good ones. Before leaving port he had discovered the incapacity of the crew, so hastily scraped together. A bad lot, he could see at first sight—rough, ribald, and drunken. In all, there are eleven of them, the second mate included; the last, as already stated, a Spaniard, by name Padilla. There are three others of the same race—Spaniards, or Spanish-Americans—Gil Gomez, Jose Hernandez, and Jacinto Velarde; two Englishmen, Jack Striker and Bill Davis; a Frenchman, by name La Crosse; a Dutchman; and a Dane; the remaining two being men whose nationality is difficult to determine, and scarce known to themselves—such as may be met on almost every ship that sails the sea.

The chief officer of the *Condor*, accustomed to a man-o'-war, with its rigid discipline, is already disgusted with what is going on aboard the merchantman. He was so before leaving San

Francisco, having also some anxiety about the navigation of the vessel. With a crew so incapable, he anticipated difficulty, if not danger. But now that he is out upon the open ocean, he is sure of the first, and keenly apprehensive of the last. For, in less than a single day's sailing, he has discovered that the sailors, besides counting short, are otherwise untrustworthy. Several of them are not sailors at all, but "long-shore" men; one or two mere "land-lubbers," who never laid hand upon a ship's rope before clutching those of the *Condor*. With such, what chance will there be for working the ship in a storm?

But there is a danger he dreads far more than the mismanagement of ropes and sails—insubordination. Even thus early, it has shown itself among the men, and may at any moment break out into open mutiny. All the more likely from the character of Captain Lantanas, with which he has become well acquainted.

The Chilian skipper is an easy-going man, given to reading books of natural history, and

collecting curiosities—as evinced by his brace of Bornean apes, and other specimens picked up during his trading trip to the Indian Archipelago. A man in every way amiable, but just on this account the most unfitted to control a crew, such as that he has shipped for the voyage to Valparaiso.

Absorbed in his studies, he takes little notice of them, leaving them in the hands, and to the control, of his *piloto*, Harry Blew.

But the ex-man-o'-war's man, though a typical British sailor, is not one of the happy-go-lucky kind. He has been entrusted with something more than the navigation of the Chilian ship—with the charge of two fair ladies in her cabin; and although these have not shown themselves on deck, he knows they are safe, and well waited on by the black cook; who is also steward, and who, under his rough sable skin, has a kindly, gentle heart.

It is when thinking of his cabin passengers, that the *Condor's* first-officer feels apprehensive,

and then not from the incapacity of her sailors, but their bold, indeed almost insolent, behaviour. Their having shown something of this at first might have been excusable, or, at all events, capable of explanation. They had not yet sobered down. Fresh from the streets of San Francisco, so lawless and licentious, it could not be expected. But most of them have been now some days aboard—no drink allowed them save the regular ration, with plenty of everything else. Kind treatment from captain and mate, and still they appear scowling and discontented, as if the slightest slur—an angry word, even a look—would make mutiny among them.

What can it mean? What do the men want?

A score of times has Harry Blew thus interrogated himself, without receiving satisfactory answer. It is to obtain this, he is now gliding silently about the decks, and 'here and there concealing himself in shadow, with the hope of overhearing some speech that will give him explanation of the conspiracy—if conspiracy it be.

And in this hope he is not deceived or disappointed, but successful beyond his most sanguine expectations. For he at length obtains a clue, not only to the insubordination of the sailors, but all else that has been puzzling him.

And a strange problem it is, its solution appalling.

He gets the latter while standing under a piece of sail-cloth, spread from the rail to the top of the round-house—rigged up by the carpenter as a sun-screen, while doing some work during the heat of the day, and so left. The sky being now starless and pitch-black, with this additional obstruction to light, Harry Blew stands in obscurity impenetrable to the eye. A man passing, so close as almost to touch, could not possibly see him.

Nor is he seen by two men, who, like himself, sauntering about, have come to a stop under the spread canvas. Unlike him, however, they are not silent, but engaged in conversation, in a low tone, still loud enough for him to hear every word said. And to every one he listens with interest

so engrossing, that his breath is well nigh suspended.

He understands what is said; all the easier from their talk being carried on in English—his own tongue. For they who converse are Jack Striker and Bill Davis.

And long before their dialogue comes to a close, he has not only obtained intelligence of what has hitherto perplexed him, but gets a glimpse of something beyond—that which sets his hair on end, almost causing the blood to curdle in his veins.

CHAPTER XXII.

TWO "SYDNEY DUCKS."

JACK STRIKER and Bill Davis are "Sydney Ducks," who have seen service in the chain-gangs of Australia. They have also served as sailors, this being their original calling. But since a certain voyage to the Swan River settlement—in which they were but passengers, sent out at the expense of H. B. Majesty's government—they have had aversion to the sea, and only take to it intermittently—when under the necessity of working passage from port to port for other purposes. Escaping from a colonization forced upon them, and quite uncongenial, they had thus made their way into California; and, after a run up the Sacramento, and a spell at gold-seeking, with but indifferent success, had returned to San Francisco; in the Queen City of the Pacific—

finding ways of life they liked better, than the hard labour of pick, pan, and cradle. Loafing among its low sailor-haunts, they encountered a pleasant surprise, by meeting a man who offered them five thousand dollars each to ship in a merchant-vessel, for the "short trip" to Panama! A wage so disproportioned to the service asked for, of course called for explanation; which the princely contractor gave, after having secured their confidence. It proved satisfactory to the Sydney Ducks, who, without further questioning, entered into the contract. The result was their getting conducted aboard the *Condor*—she being the vessel bound for the port of Panama.

He who had given them this handsome engagement was not the owner of the ship; no more was he her captain or supercargo; but a gentleman representing himself authorized to accept their services, for a somewhat different purpose than the mere working of her sails; and who promised to pay them in a peculiar manner—under certain contingencies, even more than the

sum stipulated, notwithstanding its magnificence.

The conditions were partially made known to them before setting foot on the ship; and though an honest sailor would scornfully have rejected them—even in the face of such tempting reward—Jack Striker and Bill Davis have accepted them without scruple or cavil. For they are not honest sailors, but ex-convicts, criminals still unreformed, and capable of any misdeed—piracy, or murder—if only money can be made thereby.

Since coming aboard the *Condor*, and mixing with her crew, they have had additional insight into the character of their contract, and the services required of them. They find that several other men have been engaged in a somewhat similar way; and at a like bounteous wage—for a while wondering at it—till after a mutual comparison of notes, and putting together their respective scraps of intelligence, with surmises added, they have arrived at a pretty accurate understanding of how the land lies, and why their *entrepreneur*—who is

no other than the second mate, Padilla—has been so liberal.

Striker, who has seen more of the world, and is the elder of the two “ducks,” has been the first to obtain this added information; and it is for the purpose of communicating it to his old chum of the chain-gang, he has asked the latter to step aside with him. For chancing to be cast together in the middle watch, an opportunity offers, which the older convict has all that day been looking out for.

Davis, of more talkative habit, is the first to break silence; which he does on the instant of their ducking under the sail-cloth.

“Well, old pal! what d’ye think of our present employ? Better than breakin’ stone for them Swan River roads, with twenty pound of iron chain clinkin’ at a fellow’s ankles. An’t it?”

“Better’n that, yes; but not’s good as it might be.”

“Tut, man, you’re always grumblin’. Five thousand dollars for a trip that isn’t like to run

up to a month—not more than a fortnight or three weeks, I should say! If that don't content you, I'd like to know what would."

"Well, mate; I'll tell 'ee what wud. *Thirty* thousand for the trip. An' Jack Striker an't like to be saterfied wi' anythin' much short o' that sum."

"You're joking, Jack?"

"No, I an't, Bill. As you knows, I'm not o' the jokin' sort; an' now mean what I say, sartin as I ever meant anythin' in my life. Both me an' you oughter get thirty thousand apiece o' this yellow stuff—that at the werry leest."

"Why, there wouldn't be enough to go around the lot that's in."

"Yes, thar wud, an' will. Old as I im, I hain't yit quite lost hearin'. My yeers are as sharp as they iver wor, an' jist as reliable. Larst night I heerd a whisper pass atween Padilla an' another o' them Spanish chaps, that's put me up to somethink."

"What did you hear?"

“That the swag ’ll tot up to the total o’ three hundred thousand dollars.”

“The deuce it will! Why, they said it wasn’t half that much. Padilla himself told me so.”

“No matter what he’s told you. I tell ye now, it’s all o’ the six figures I’ve said. In coorse, it’s their interest to make it out small as they possibly can; seein’ as our share’s to be a percentage. I know better now; an’ knowin’ it, an’t agoin’ to stan’ none o’ theer nonsense. Neyther shud you, Bill. We both o’ us are ’bout to risk the same as any o’ the tothers.”

“That’s true enough.”

“In coorse it is. An’ bein’ so, we oughter share same as them; can, an’ will, if we stick well thegither. It’s jest as eezy one way as t’other.”

“There’s something in what you say, mate.”

“Theer’s everythin’ in it, an’ nothin’ more than our rights. As I’ve said, we all risk the same, an’ that’s gettin’ our necks streetched. For if we make a mucker o’ the job, it ’ll be a

hangin' matter sure. An' I dar say theer's got to be blood spilt afore it's finished."

"What would you advise our doing? You know, Jack, I'll stand by you, whatever you go in for."

"Well; I want it to be a fair divide, all round; detarmined it shell be. Why shud the four Spanish fellas get a dollar more'n us others? As I've obsarved, two o' them, Gomez an' Hernandez, have set theer eyes on the weemen folks. It's eezy to see that's part o' theer game. Beside, I heerd them talkin' o't. Gomez be arter the light girl, an' Hernandez the dark un. 'Bout that, they may do as they like, for ought's I care. But it's all the more reezun why they oughtent be so greedy 'bout the shinin' stuff. As for Mister Gomez, it's plain he's the head man o' the lot; an' the second-mate, who engaged us, is only same's the others, an' 'pears to be controlled by him. 'Twar 'tween them two I overheerd the confab; Gomez sayin' to Padilla that the dust lyin' snug in the cabin lockers was

full valley for three hunderd thousan'. An' as theer's eleven o' us to share, that 'ud be nigh on thirty thousan' apiece, if my 'rithmetic an't out o' recknin'. Bill Davis; I say, we oughter stan' up for our rights."

"Certainly we should. But there'll be difficulty in getting them, I fear."

"Not a bit—not a morsel, if we stick out for 'em. The four Spanyolds means to go snacks 'mong themselves. But theer be seven o' us outsiders; an' when I tell the others what I've tolt you, they'll be all on our side—if they an't the foolichest o' fools."

"They won't be that, I take it. A difference of twenty thousand dollars or so in their favour, will make them sensible enough. But what's to be the upshot, or, as they call it in the theeatre play-bills, what's the programme?"

"Well, mate; so far as I've been put up to 't, we're to run on till we get down the coast, somewhere near the Issmus o' Panyma. Theer we'll sight land, an' soon's we do, the ship's to be

scuttled—we first securin' the swag, an' takin' it ashore in one o' the boats. We're to land on some part o' the coast that's known to Gomez, he says. Then we're to make for some town, when we've got things straight for puttin' in appearance in a explainable way. Otherways, we might get pulled up, an' all our trouble 'ud be for nowt. Worse, every man-Jack on us 'ud have a good chance to swing for 't."

"And the young ladies?"

"They're to go along wi' Gomez an' Hernandez. How they mean to manage it, I can't tell ye. They'll be a trouble, no doubt, as allers is wi' weemen, an' it be a pity we're hampered wi' 'em; more'n that, it's reg'lar dangersome. They may get the hul kit o' us into a scrape. Howsever, we'll hev to take our chances, since theer's no help for it. The two chaps 'pear to be reg'lar struck with 'em. Well, let 'em carry off the gurls an' welcome. But, as I've sayed, thet oughter make 'em less objectin' to a fair divide o' the dust."

“What’s to be done with the others—the old Spaniard and skipper, with the black cook and first-mate?”

“They’re to go down wi’ the ship. The intension is, to knock all o’ ’em on the head, soon’s we come in sight o’ land.”

“Well, Jack; for the first three I don’t care a brass farthing. They’re foreigners and blacks; therefore, nothing to us. But, as Blew chances to be a countryman of ours, I’d rather it didn’t go so hard with him.”

“Balderdash, Bill Davis! What have you or me to do wi’ feelins o’ that sort? Countryman, indeed! A fine country, as starves ten millions o’ the like o’ us two; an’ if we try to take what by nateral right’s our own, sends us out o’ it wi’ handcuffs round our wrists, an’ iron jewelry on our ankles! All stuff an’ psalm-singin’ that ’bout one’s own country, an’ fella-countryman. If we let him off, we might meet him somewhere, when we an’t a-wantin’ to. He’ll have to be sarved same as the tother three. There be no

help for 't, if we don't want to have hemp roun' our thrapples."

"I suppose you're right, Striker; though it does seem a pity too. But what reason have the Spaniards for keepin' the thing back? Why should they wait till we get down by Panama? As the yellow stuff's lyin' ready, sure it might be grabbed at once, an' then we'd have more time to talk of how it's to be divided? What's the difficulty about our taking it now?"

"'Tan't the takin' o' 't. That 'll be eezy work; an' when the time comes, we'll have it all our own way. We could toss the four overboard in the skippin' o' a flea. But then, how's the ship to be navygated without the skipper an' first-mate?"

"Surely we can do without them?"

"That's jest what we can't. O' all our crew, theer's only them two as hev the knowledge o' charts an' chronometers, an' the like; for him's as is actin' second confesses he don't know nothin' 'bout sich. Tharfor, though we're in a good soun' craft, without the skipper, or Blew,

we'd be most as good as helpless. We're now on the biggest o' all oceans, an' if we stood on the wrong tack, we might niver set eyes on land—or only to be cast away on some dangersome shore. Or, what 'ud be bad as eyther, get overhauled by some man-o'-war, an' not able to gie account o' ourselves. Theer's the diffyculty, don't 'ee see, Bill? For thet reezun, the Spanyards hev agreed to let things alone till we've ran down nigh Panyma. Theer Gomez says he knows o' a long stretch o' uninhabited coast, where we'll be safe goin' ashore."

"Well; I suppose that'll be the best way, after all. If a man has the money, it don't make much difference where he sets foot on shore; an' no doubt we'll find sport down at Panyma, good as anywheres else."

"Theer ye be right, Bill. When a cove's flush there's pleasurin' iverywhere. Goold's the only thing as gives it."

"With the prospect of such big plunder, we can afford to be patient," says Davis, resignedly.

"I an't agoin' to be patient for the paltry five thousand they promised. No, Bill; neyther must you. We've equal rights wi' the rest, an' we must stan' out for 'em."

"Soon as you say the word, Jack, I'm at your back. So 'll all the others, who're in the same boat with ourselves."

"They oughter, an' belike will; tho' theer's a weak-witted fool or two as may take talkin' into it. I means to go at 'em the night, soon 's I've finished my trick at the wheel, the which 'll soon be on. Ay! theer's the bells now! I must aft. When I come off, Bill, you be up by the night-heads, an' have that Dutch chap as is in our watch 'long wi' ye; an' also the Dane. They're the likeliest to go in wi' us at oncet, an' we'll first broach it to them."

"All right, old pal; I'll be there."

The two plotters step out from under the awning; Striker turning aft to take his "trick" at the wheel, the other sauntering off in the direction of the forecastle.

CHAPTER XXIII.

AN APPALLING PROSPECT.

HARRY BLEW stands aghast—his hair on end, the blood coursing chill through his veins.

No wonder, after listening to such revelations ! A plot diabolical—a scheme of atrocity unparalleled—comprising three horrible crimes : robbery, the abduction of women, and the murder of men ; and among the last, himself.

Now knows he the cause of the crew's insubordination ; too clearly comprehends it. Three hundred thousand dollars of gold-dust stowed in the cabin-lockers !

News to him ; for Captain Lantanas had not made him acquainted with the fact—the treasure having been shipped before his coming aboard. Indeed, on that same night when he went after Silvestre, for at the very time he was knocking at

the ship-agent's office-door, Don Tomas, with a trusty waterman, was engaged in putting it aboard the Chilian ship.

An unfortunate arrangement, after all. And now too certain of ending disastrously, not only for Don Gregorio, but those dear to him, with others less interested, yet linked to his fate.

Though the ex-man-of-war's man is neither doubtful nor incredulous of what he has just heard, it is some time before his mind can grasp all the details. So filled is he with astonishment, it is natural his thoughts should be confused, and himself excited.

But soon he reflects calmly; and revolving everything over, perceives clearly enough what are the crimes to be committed, with the motives for committing them. There can be no ambiguity about the nature of the nefarious conspiracy. It has all been hatched, and prearranged, on shore; and the scoundrels have come aboard specially for its execution. The four Spaniards—or Californians, as he believes them to be—must

have had knowledge of the treasure being shipped, and, in their plan to appropriate it, have engaged the others to assist them. Striker's talk has told this ; while revealing also the still more fiendish designs of abduction and murder.

The prospect is appalling ; and as he reflects upon it, Harry Blew feels his heart sink within him—strong though that heart be. For a dread fate is impending over himself, as well as those he has promised to protect.

How it is to be averted ? How he is to save Carmen Montijo and Inez Alvarez ? How save himself ?

These questions come crowding together, and repeat themselves over and over ; but without suggesting answer. He cannot think of one that is satisfactory ; he sees no chance of escape. The crew are all in the plot—every man of them—either as principals, or engaged assistants. The conversation of the two convicts has told this. The second-mate same as the rest ; which to him, Harry Blew, causes no surprise. He had already

made up his mind about Padilla ; observing his sympathy with those who were showing insubordination. He had also noticed that in whatever was up among them, Gil Gomez was the directing spirit ; dominating Padilla, notwithstanding the latter's claim to superior authority as one of the ship's officers ; while Velarde and Hernandez seemed also to be controlled by him. The last, Harry Blew has discovered to be a landsman, with no sea-experience whatever ; when found out, excusing himself on the plea that he wished to work his passage to Panama. The position of the other seven is understood by what Striker said. All are equal in the scheme of pillage and murder—though not to have equal reward.

Bringing them one after another before his mind ; recalling his experience of them—which, though short, has given him some knowledge of their character—the *Condor's* first-officer cannot think of one likely to take sides with him. They are all men of iniquity ; and in defending the

innocent he will have to stand alone. For it will amount to almost that, with no other help than Captain Lantanas, Don Gregorio, and the cook; the first, a slight slender man, with just strength enough to handle a telescope; the second, aged, and something of an invalid; the third, for fighting purposes, scarce worth thinking of. His fidelity might be depended upon; but he is also an oldish man, and would count for little in a conflict, with such desperadoes as those who design making themselves masters of the ship.

All these points present themselves to the mind of the first-mate, clearly, impressively.

A thought of telling Captain Lantanas what he has discovered, and which at first naturally occurred to him, he no longer entertains. The trusting Chilean skipper would scarce give credit to such an atrocious scheme. And if he did, in all likelihood it would result in his taking some rash step, which would but quicken their action, and bring sooner on the fatal catastrophe.

No; 'twill never do to make him acquainted with the danger, great as it is.

Nor yet should Don Gregorio know of it. The terrible secret must be kept from both, and carefully. Either of them aware of it, and in an hour after, all might be over—the tragedy enacted, and its victims consigned to the sea—himself, Harry Blew, being one of them!

Still crouching under the sail, he trembles, as in fancy he conjures up a fearful scene; vividly, as though the reality were before his eyes. In the midst of the open ocean, or close to land, the tragedy to be enacted will be all the same. The girls seized; the Captain, Don Gregorio, the cook, and himself, shot down, or poniarded; after that, the gold dragged out of the lockers; the vessel scuttled, and sunk; a boat alone left to carry the pirates ashore, with their spoils and captives!

Contemplating such a scene—even though only in imagination—it is not strange that the *Condor's* first-officer feels a shivering throughout his

frame. He feels it in every fibre. And reflection fails to give relief; since it suggests to him no plan for saving himself. On the contrary, the more he dwells on it, the more is he sensible of the danger—sees it in all its stark naked reality. Against such odds a conflict would be hopeless. It could only end in death to all who have been singled out, himself perhaps the first.

For a time he stands in silent cogitation, with despair almost paralyzing his heart. He is unable to think steadily, or clearly. Doubtful, unfeasible, schemes shape themselves in his mind; idle thoughts flit across his brain; all the while wild tumultuous emotions coursing through his soul.

At length, and after prolonged reflection, he seems to have made a resolve. As his countenance is in shadow, its expression cannot be seen; but, judging by the words that are muttered by his lips, it is one which should be unworthy of a British sailor—in short, that of a *traitor*.

For his soliloquy seems to show that he has yielded to craven fear—intends surrendering up the sacred trust reposed in him, and along with it his honour!

The words are :

“I must cast my lot in along wi’ them. It’s the only chance ; an’ for the savin’ o’ my own life ! *I’ll do that. Lord help me, I’ll do it !*”

CHAPTER XXIV.

PLOT UPON PLOT.

THE *Condor* is sailing large, with a light breeze several points abaft the beam.

Jack Striker is at the wheel; and as the sea is smooth, he finds it easy steering, having little to do but keep the barque steady, by taking an occasional squint at the compass-card.

The moon—which has just risen—shining in his face, shows it to be that of a man over fifty, with the felon in its every line and lineament. It is beardless, pock-pitted, with thick shapeless lips, broad hanging jowls, nostrils agape, and nose flattened like the snout of a bull-dog. Eyes gosling-green, both bleary, one of them blood-shot. For all, eyes that, by his

own boast, "can see into a millstone as far as the man who picks it."

He has not been many minutes at his post, when he sees some one approaching from the waist of the ship; a man, whom he makes out to be the first-mate.

"Comin' to con me," growls the ex-convict. "Don't wan't any o' his connin', not I. Jack Striker can keep a ship on her course well's him, or any other 'board o' this craft."

He is on the starboard side of the wheel, while the mate is approaching along the port gangway. The latter, after springing up to the poop-deck, stops opposite the steersman, as he does so, saying:

"Well, Striker, old chap! not much trouble with her to-night. She's goin' free too, with the wind in the right quarter. We ought to be making good nine knots?"

"All o' that, I darsay, sir," rejoins Striker, mollified by the affable manner in which the first-officer has addressed him. "The barque

ain't a bad 'un to go, though she be a queery-rigged craft 's ever I war aboard on."

"You've set foot on a goodish many, I should say, judgin' from the way ye handle a helm. I see you understan' steerin' a ship."

"I oughter, master," answers the helmsman, further flattered by the compliment to his professional skill. "Jack Striker's had a fair show o' schoolin' to that bizness."

"Been a man-o'-war's man, han't you?"

"Ay, all o' that. Any as doubts it can see the warrant on my back, an' welcome to do so. Plenty o' the cat's claws there, an' I don't care a brass fardin' who knows it."

"Neyther need ye. Many a good sailor can show the same. For myself, I han't had the cat, but I've seed a man-o'-war sarvice, an' some roughish treatment too. An' I've seed sarvice on ships man-o'-war's men have chased—likin' that sort a little better; I did."

"Indeed!" exclaims the ex-convict, turning his eyes with increased interest on the man

thus frankly confessing himself. "Smuggler? Or maybe slaver?"

"Little bit o' both. An' as you say 'bout the cat, *I* don't care a brass fardin' who knows o' it. It's been a hardish world wi' me; plenty o' ups an' downs; the downs of'ener than the ups. Just now things are lookin' sort o' uppish. I've got my berth here, 'count o' the scarcity o' hands in San Francisco, an' the luck o' knowin' how to take sights, an' keep a log. Still, the pay an't much, considerin' the chances left behind. I daresay I'd 'a done a deal better by stayin' in Californy, an' goin' on to them gold-diggin's up in the Sacamenta mountains."

"You han't been theer, han't ye?"

"No. Never went a cable's length ayont the town o' Francisco."

"Maybe, jest as well ye didn't, Master Blew. Me an' Bill Davis tried that dodge; we went all the way to the washin's on Feather River; but foun' no gold, only plenty o' hard work, wi'

precious little to eat, an' less in the way o' drink. Neyther o' us likin' the life, we put back for the port."

For all his frankness in confessing to the cat-o'-nine tails on board a war-ship, Striker says nothing about a rope of a different kind, he and his chum Davis were very near getting around their necks on the banks of that same Feather River, and from which they escaped by a timely retreat upon "Frisco."

"Well," rejoins Blew, in a tone of resignation; "as you say, maybe I've did the wisest thing after all, in not goin' that way. I might 'a come back empy-handed, same as yerself an' Davis. Ye say liquor war scarce up there. That 'ud never 'a done for me. I must have my reg'lar allowance, or—— Well, no use sayin' what. As an old man-o'-war's man, you can understan' me, Striker. An' as the same, I suppose you won't object to a tot now?"

"Two, for that matter," promptly responds Striker, like all his sort, drouthy.

“ Well ; here’s a drop o’ rum—the best Santa Cruz. Help yourself ! ”

Blew presents a black-jack bottle to the helmsman, who, detaching one hand from the spokes, takes hold of the bottle. Then, raising it to his lips, and keeping it there for a prolonged spell, returns it to its owner, who, for the sake of sociability, takes a pull himself. All this done, the dialogue is renewed, and progresses in even a more friendly way than before ; the Santa Cruz having opened the heart of the Sydney Duck to a degree of familiarity ; while, on his side, the mate, throwing aside all reserve, lets himself down to a level with the foremastman.

It ends in their establishing a confidence, mutual and complete, of that character known as “ thickness between thieves.”

Blew first strikes the chord that puts their spirits *en rapport*, by saying :

“ Ye tell me, Striker, that ye’ve had hard times an’ some severe punishment. So’s had Harry

Blew. An' ye say ye don't care about that. No more cares he. In that we're both o' us in the same boat. An' now we're in the same ship—you a sailor afore the mast, I first-officer—but for all the difference in our rank, we can work thegether. An' there's a way we can both o' us do better. Do you want me to tell it ye ? ”

“ Ay, ay ; tell it. Jack Striker's ears are allus open to 'ear 'ow he can better his sittivation in life. I'm a listener.”

“ All right. I've observed you're a good hand at the helm. Would ye be as good to go in for a job that'll put a pile o' money in your pocket ? ”

“ That depends. Not on what sort o' job ; I don't mean that. But what's the figger—the 'mount o' the money—how much ? ”

“ Puttin' it in gold, as much as you can carry ; ay, enough to make you stagger under it.”

“ An' you ask if I'm good for a job like that ? Funny question to ask—it are ; 'specially puttin' it to ole Jack Striker. He's good for't—wi' the

gallows starin' him full in the face. Daanged if he an't!'

"Well; I thought you wuldn't be the one to show basket-faced 'bout it. It's a big thing I hev on hand, an' there 'll be a fortin for all who go in for 't."

"Show Jack Striker the chance o' goin' in, an' he'll show you a man as know no backin' out."

"Enough, shipmate. The chance is close to hand; aboard o' this ship. Below, in her cabin lockers there's stowed somethin' like half a ton o' glitterin' gold-dust. It belongs to the old Spaniard that's passenger. What's to hinder us to lay hands on 't? If we can only get enough o' the crew to say *yes*, there needs be no difficulty. Them as won't 'll have to stan' aside. Though, from what I see o' them, it's like they'll all come in. Divided square round, there'd be atween twenty an' thirty thousand dollars apiece. Do that tempt ye, Striker?"

"Rayther. Wi' thirty thousand dollars I'd ne'er do another stroke o' work."

“You needn’t, then. You can have all o’ that, by joinin’ in, an’ helpin’ me to bring round the rest. Do you know any o’ them ye could speak to ’bout the bizness—wi’ safety, I mean?”

“I do. Two or three. One sartin; my ole chum, Bill Davis. He can be trusted wi’ a secret o’ throat-cuttin’, let alone a trifle sich as you speak o’. An’ now, Master Blew, since you’ve seed fit to confide in me, I’m goin’ to gie ye a bit o’ my confidince. It’s but fair ’tween two men as hev got to understan’ one the tother. I may’s well tell ye that I know all about the stuff in the cabin lockers—hev knowed it iver since settin’ fut in the *Condor*’s fore’s’l. Me an’ Bill war talkin’ o’t jist afore I coomed to the wheel. You an’t the only one as hez set theer hearts on hevin’ it. Them Spanish chaps hez got it all arranged arready—an’ had afore they shipped ’board this barque. Thar’s the four o’ ’em, as I take it, all standin’ in equal; whiles the rest o’ the crew war only to get so much o’ a fixed sum.”

“Striker, ye ’stonish me!”

“Well, I’m only tellin’ ye what be true, an’ what I knows to be so. I’m gled you’re agreeable to go in wi’ us; the which ’ll save trouble, an’ yer own life as well. For I may as well tell ye, Master Blew, that they’d made up thar minds to send ye to the bottom o’ the briny, ’long wi’ skipper an’ the ole Spaniard, wi’ the black throwed into the bargain.”

“That’s a nice bit o’ news to hear, by jingo! Well, Jack; I’m thankful to ye for communicatin’ it. Lord! it’s lucky for me we’ve this night chanced to get talkin’ thegeather.”

“Thar maybe luck in’t all roun’. Bill an’ me’d made up our minds to stan’ out for a equal divide o’ the dust—like shares to ivery man. Shud there be any dispute ’bout that bein’ fair, wi’ you on our side, we’ll eezy settle it our way, spite o’ them Spaniards. If they refuse to agree, an’ it coomes to fightin’, then Jack Striker’s good for any two on ’em.”

“An’ Harry Blew for any other two. No fear

but we can fix that. How many do you think will be with us?"

"Most all, I shud say, 'ceptin' the Spanyards themselves. It consarns the rest same's it do us. 'Tall events, we're bound to ha' the majority."

"When do you propose, we should begin broachin' it to them?"

"Straight away, if you say the word. I'll try some o' 'em soon 's I've goed off from heer. Thar be several on the watch 'as'll be takin' a drop o' grog thegether, 'fore we turns in. No time better nor now."

"True. So set at 'em at once, Striker. But mind ye, mate, be cautious how ye talk to them, an' don't commit ayther of us too far, till you've larnt their temper. I'll meet ye in the first dog-watch the morrow. Then you can tell me how the land's likely to lie."

"All right. I'll see to 't in the smooth way. Ye can trust Jack Striker for that."

"Take another suck o' the Santa Cruz. If this trip proves prosp'rous in the way we're

plannin' it, neyther you nor me'll need to go without the best o' good liquor for the rest o' our lives."

Again Striker clutches at the proffered bottle, and holds it to his head—this time till he has drained it dry.

Returned to him empty, Harry Blew tosses it overboard. Then parting from the steersman, he commences moving forward, as with the design to look after other duties.

As he steps out from under the shadow of the spanker, the moon gleaming athwart his face, shows on it an expression which neither pencil, nor pen, could depict. Difficult indeed to interpret it. The most skilled physiognomist would be puzzled to say, whether it is the reproach of conscious guilt, or innocence driven to desperation.

CHAPTER XXV.

SHARE AND SHARE ALIKE.

IN the *Condor's* fore-castle.

It is her third night since leaving San Francisco, and the second watch is on deck; the men of the first having gone down below. That on duty is Padilla's; in it Gomez, Hernandez, Velarde, and the two sailors of nationality unknown.

The off-watch consists of Striker, Davis, the Frenchman who is called La Crosse, with the Dutchman and Dane.

All these five are in the fore-peak, the chief-mate, as they suppose, having retired to rest.

They have been below for some time, and it is now near eleven o'clock of the night. All have finished their suppers, and are seated, some on the sides of their bunks, some on sea-chests. A

large one of the latter, cleeted in the centre of the floor, does service as a table. Upon it is a black bottle containing rum—the sailor's orthodox drink. In his hand, each holds his pannikin, while in every mouth there is a pipe, and the forecastle is full of smoke. A pack of playing-cards lies on the lid of the chest; greasy and begrimed, as if they had seen long service. Though not any on this particular night, or in the hands of those sitting around, who show no inclination to touch them. They may have been used by the men of the watch now on deck; this, probably enough, since the cards are Spanish, as told by their picturing.

Those occupying the forecastle now have something on their minds more important than card-playing: a question of money; but not money to be made in that way. What they are thinking about, and talking of, is the gold-dust in the cabin lockers; not how it is to be got out of them, but how it shall be distributed after it is out.

This is not the first time the subject has been before them. There has been talk of it all that day; though only between them in twos, and informally. Since finding out how things stood, and especially after his confab with the first-mate, Striker, as promised, has been sounding his ship-mates, one after another. He has communicated his purpose to all, and had their approval of it—the four Spaniards excepted. These he has not yet approached; but this night intends doing so—as the others insist that an immediate understanding be arrived at, and the thing definitively settled.

The five are now waiting till those on the watch, not required for deck-duty, come below. All of them have had intimation they will be wanted in the forecabin; and as the night is fine, with no occasion for changing sails, or other occupation, only the helmsman need absent himself from a muster, whose summons to most of the second-watch has appeared a little strange.

They obey it, notwithstanding; and after a

while the two sailors come down—the nonde-
scripts without name; though one goes by the
sobriquet of “Old Tarry,” the other having had
bestowed upon him the equally distinctive, but
less honourable, appellation of “Slush.”

Shortly after, the second mate, Padilla, makes
his appearance, along with him Velarde; the
former a man who has seen some forty winters,
rugged in frame, with bronzed complexion, and
features forbidding, as any that ever belonged
to freebooter; the latter in this respect not so
unlike him, only younger, of a more slender
frame, and less rude in speech, as in manner.

Soon as setting foot on the fore-castle's floor,
Padilla, as an officer of the ship, speaking in tone
of authority, demands to know why they have
been summoned thither.

Striker, putting himself forward as the spokes-
man of the off-watch, replies :

“Hadn't ye better sit down, master mate?
The subjeck we're goin' to discuss may take a
start o' time, an' it's as cheap sittin' as

standin'. Maybe ye won't mind joinin' us in a drink?"

Saying this, the ex-convict clutches at the bottle, pours some rum into his pannikin, and offers it to Padilla.

The Spaniard accepting, drinks; and, passing the cup to Velarde, sits down.

The latter imitating him as to the drink, takes seat by his side; Old Tarry and Slush having already disposed of themselves.

"Now," pursues the second-mate, "let's hear what it's all about."

"Theer be two not yit among us," says Striker. "In coorse, one's at the wheel."

"Yes; Gomez is there," responds Padilla.

"Where be Hernandez?"

"I don't know. Likely, along with him."

"Don't much matter," puts in Davis. "I dar' say we can settle the thing without either. You begin, Jack; tell Mr. Padilla, and the rest, what we've been talking about."

"'Twon't take a very long time to tell it,"

responds Striker. "Theer be no great need for wastin' words. All I've got to say are, that the *swag shud be eekilly divided.*"

Padilla starts, Velarde doing the same.

"What do you mean?" asks the former, putting on an air of innocence.

"I means what I've sayed—that the swag shud be eekilly divided."

"And yet I don't understand you."

"Yis, ye do. Come, Master Padilla, 'tain't no use shammin' ignorance--not wi' Jack Striker, 't all events. He be too old a bird to get cheated wi' chaff. If ye want to throw dust into my eyes, it must be o' the sort that's stowed aft in the cuddy. Now, d'ye understan' me?"

Padilla looks grave, so does Velarde. Old Tarry and Slush show no sign of feeling; both being already prepared for the demand Striker intended to make, and having given their promise to back it.

"Well," says the second-mate, "you appear to

be talking of some gold-dust. And, I suppose, you know all about it?"

"That we do," responds Striker.

"Well, what then?" asks Padilla.

"Only what I've said," rejoins the Sydney Duck. "If you weesh, I can say it over 'gain. That theer yellow stuff shud be measured out to the crew o' this craft share and share alike, even hands all roun' without respectin' o' parsons. An', by G—d! it shall be so deevided—shall, will, an' must."

"Yes!" endorses Davis, with like emphatic affirmation. "It shall, and it must!"

"*Pe gar*, most it!" adds the Frenchman; followed in the same strain by Stronden the Dane, and Van Houton the Dutchman, chorused by Old Tarry and Slush.

"It an't no use your stannin' out, masters," continues Striker, addressing himself to the two Spaniards. "Ye see the majority's against ye; an' in all cases o' the kind, wheresomever I've seed 'em, the majority means the right. Besides,

in this partickler case we're askin' no moren' what's right—refarrin' to the job afore us. I'm willin' to conceed, that you Spanish chaps hev hed most to do wi' the first plannin' o' the thing; as alser, that ye brought the rest o' us into it. But what signify the bringin' in, compared wi' the gettin' out? In sich scrapes, 'tain't the beginnin' but the eend as is dangersome. An' we've all got to unnergo that danger; the which I need'nt particklarly speak o'; as every man o' ye must feel it 'bout the nape o' his neck, seein' the risk he'll hev to run o' gettin' that strectched. It's eequil all roun', and tharfor the reward for runnin' it shed be eequil too. So say Jack Striker."

"So I, and I, and I," echo the others; all save Padilla and Velarde, who remain silent and scowling.

"Yis," continues Striker, "an' theer be one who an't present among us, as oughter have his share too. I don't mean either Mr. Gomez, or Hernandez. Them two shud be contented,

seein' as they're more after the weemen than the money, an' nobody as I know o' carin' to cut 'em out there. It's true him I refer to hes come into the thing at the 'leventh hour, as ye may say—after 'twar all planned. But he mote a gied us trouble by stannin' apart. Tharfor, I say, let's take him in on shares wi' the rest."

"Whom are you speaking of?" demands Padilla.

"I needn't tell ye," responds the senior of the Sydney Ducks; "if I an't mistook, that's him a comin' down, an' he can speak for hisself."

At the words, afootstep is heard upon the fore-castle stair. A pair of legs is seen descending; after them a body—the body of Harry Blew!

Padilla looks scared; Velarde the same. Both fancy their conspiracy discovered, their scheme blown; and that Striker with all his talk has been misleading them. They almost believe they are to be set upon, and put in irons; and that for this very purpose the first-officer is entering the fore-castle.

They are soon undeceived, however, on hearing what he has to say. Striker draws it out, repeating the conversation passed, and the demand he has been making.

Thus Harry Blew gives rejoinder:

“ I’m with ye, shipmates, to the end, be that sweet or bitter. Striker talks straight, an’ his seems the only fair way of settlin’ the question. The majority must decide. There’s two not here, an’ they’ve got to be consulted. They’re both by the wheel. Tharfore, let’s go aft, an’ talk the thing there. There’s no fear for our bein’ interrupted. The skipper’s asleep, an’ we’ve got the ship to ourselves.”

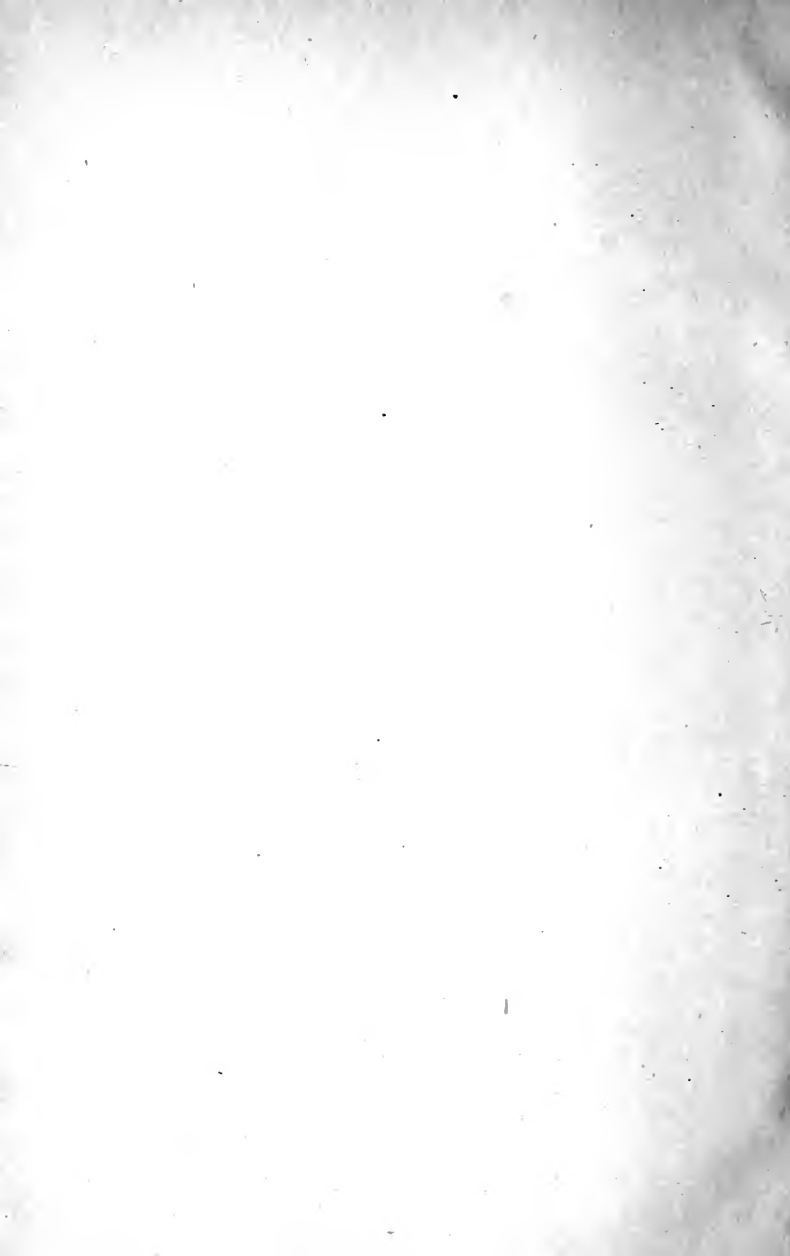
So saying, he leads up the ladder, the rest rising from their seats, and crowding after.

Once on deck, they cluster around the fore-hatch, and there stop ; the first-mate having something to say to them before proceeding farther.

The second does not take part in this conference ; but stealing past unseen, glides on towards the after-part of the ship.

Soon the others saunter in the same direction, in twos and threes straggling along the waist, but again gathering into a group around the capstan. There the moonlight, falling full upon their faces, betrays the expression of men in mutiny; but mutiny unopposed. For, on the quarter-deck no one meets them. The traitorous first-officer has spoken truly: the captain is asleep; they have the ship to themselves!

END OF VOL. II.











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